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PROBLEMS OF THE BALTIC

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PROBLEMS OF THE BALTIC

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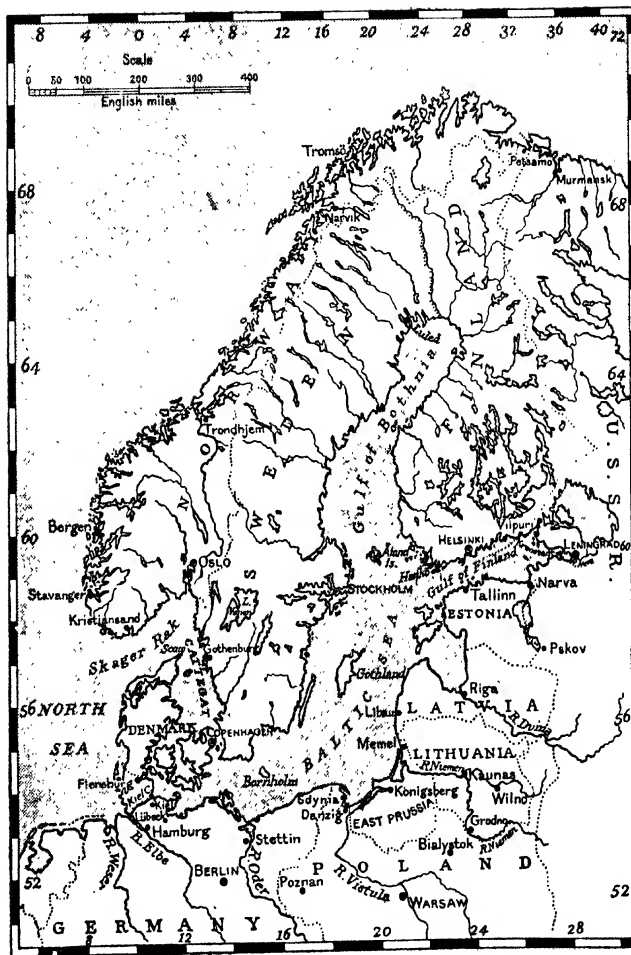
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THE BALTIC STATES

PROBLEMS OF THE BALTIC

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

FOR sheer speed, nothing in previous history had approached the Baltic vicissitudes of 1939. Without firing a shot, Lithuania found herself first dismembered by Germany and then subjugated by Russia. The one by depriving her of Memel reduced her territory by 5 per cent., her population by 6 per cent., and her nascent industry by a far higher figure. The other, while depriving her of real independence, increased her territory by 13 per cent. and her population by almost one in five. Poland suffered in a month a bloody dismemberment such as in the eighteenth century needed more than twenty years. The way was thus prepared for the conquest of Denmark within a night.

Thus in the autumn of 1939 German aggression made the quiet Baltic, a region not far distant from Britain, but little known to her people, the theatre of a desperate battle for civilisation. Might is

right, a doctrine maintained in various disguises by Louis XIV and Napoleon, by Frederick the Great and modern Germany, reappeared with unexampled vitality. Checked in the Great War, it had gained facile triumphs in China, Abyssinia, Austria and Czechoslovakia, each more flagrant than the last. Hitler next applied it to the southern Baltic shore, but Poland declined to be browbeaten. Then a vast secret diplomatic revolution was revealed, and the Third Reich appeared as the associate of the Soviet Union. In a moment the whole basis of world politics was changed, and every previous combination and calculation overthrown.

No region felt the change more acutely than did the Baltic. Upon the shores of that inland sea, six states at least based their security on the antithesis between Germany and Russia. For nearly twenty years the Soviet power had conformed to its founders' principle, no intervention among neighbouring peoples except by their desire. Communism, the early Bolsheviks maintained, was too reasonable not to make its own way, and the nations which enjoyed it needed only peace. In 1939 the Soviet could point with pride to its good relations with its neighbours on the Baltic, of whom four had belonged wholly, and a fifth in great part, to Tsarist Russia. Pending a voluntary bolshevisation of the world, all could rejoice that a more liberal era prevailed.

A few weeks changed the whole scene. Poland, with her 35,000,000 people, went down before the eightfold strength of the two Great Powers. The so-called "Baltic States," Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, could not refuse the demands of a Russian Empire with thirty times their united populations. By accepting Soviet garrisons they virtually lost their independence. Finland came next, and the world wondered who would follow her on the list of victims. The Finns, however, knew only too well both the weight of Russia and the consequences of accepting her mastery. In a desperate dilemma, their statesmen chose the heroic course, and army and people won undying fame. None the less, the Great Power triumphed, and Danes, Norwegians, Dutch and Belgians were in turn menaced with "protection" by its confederate.

No nation watched these staggering events with a keener sense of impotence and of exasperation than did our own. To the vast majority, indeed, the Baltic had been for many years an unknown region. Those who made holiday abroad found scenes of greater interest and beauty in nearer lands, with less expenditure of time and money and less formidable barriers of speech. The days when the Danes included British provinces in their empire or when the Baltic lay on the main street of world trade seemed incredibly remote. Even the Briton who

finds a Danzig quarter entitled "Scotland," or a Memel Victorian building inscribed "English Church" feels an irrational surprise. As recently as 1878, indeed, the Danes expected the British fleet to strike at Russia from the Baltic, and in the Great War some bold strategists favoured a like stroke against the Germans. Such action, however, is as obsolete as our dependence on the Baltic for naval supplies or hers upon English cloth. However vital they may be to Britain, world decisions in the Baltic must be reached while her fleet and army are far away.

A preliminary "Problem of the Baltic" is to determine where the sea itself begins and ends. Physically, a sheet of water about one-seventh as spacious as the Mediterranean is formed in the depression beyond the Danish islands by rivers which drain about one-fifth of Europe. This vast lake, tideless, brackish and shallow, pours its surplus waters through the Cattegat and, rounding the Skaw, through the Skagerrak, into the North Sea. Countless maps make these two channels independent of either sea, but a contributor to the *Encyclopædia Britannica* declares them "usually included in the Baltic." The traveller who at the Skaw turns sharply in his sea course or from the land observes the Baltic outflow contending with the salter tide from the North Sea feels that the Cattegat at least

should be assigned to "the Baltic proper" and Norway reckoned as to some extent a Baltic Power. A recent Finnish writer, on the other hand, speaks of "the junction of the Baltic and the Gulf of Bothnia." This violent phrase may usefully remind us that even "the Baltic proper" is much divided up. It recalls the fact that islands screen from the main sea both the northern gulf and the so-called Gulf of Riga. Steam has reduced the dangers of approach, but modern times have given these barriers, especially the Åland group, a new strategical importance.

"Few parts of the globe," wrote Milner in 1854, of the Baltic Sea, "have a more unique natural character." Low-lying shores, vast land basin, sudden storms and local changes of level by stress of wind, copious precipitation, innumerable shallows and islands, long interruption of navigation by ice—these and the fact that its northern shores are continually rising seem to justify his remark. Its poverty in fish and richness in amber, "an indurated fossil resin produced by an extinct species of pine," as well as the erratic blocks of stone which it transports and the curious lagoons behind the sandspits of its south-eastern shore, form characteristic features. In the straitness of its single natural gateway it is surpassed among European waters only by the Black Sea.

From the chequered history of the Baltic, which

has witnessed Slavonic peoples now dominant to westward of the Elbe, now forbidden to launch a boat even upon the Gulf of Finland, three generalisations may be deduced. First, many Powers have aimed at mastery, but no Baltic empire has long endured. The Danes, the Hansards, the Swedes, the Habsburgs, the French, the Russians and the modern Germans stand out among the disappointed. Second, none of the many States which now rank as "Baltic" has succeeded in holding permanently both shores of any of its several arms. Danes and Swedes in the Sound, Swedes on the Gulf of Bothnia, Swedes and Russians on the Gulf of Finland, Swedes south of their own peninsula—all have hitherto failed. Third, the nations which now rank as "Baltic" do so in varying degrees. Their dependence upon that sea, indeed, is almost in inverse ratio to their population. Only on the south-eastern shores are there States which border on no other sea, and for Germany and the Soviet Union their non-Baltic ports far surpass their Baltic in importance.

Let us first consider those most "Baltic" States to which the term "Baltic States" is often applied—Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, then Finland and Poland, then the Scandinavian group, and finally the two Great Powers. Such a survey may appropriately lead to a discussion of the outlook with regard to the Baltic problem as a whole.

CHAPTER II

LITHUANIA, LATVIA AND ESTONIA

SOUTH of the Gulf of Finland lie three small republics which in many respects have formed a single unit. Physically, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania comprise very roughly an oblong between a northern boundary of about 200 miles along the Gulf of Finland and a somewhat shorter line nearly 400 miles south of it. Their land surface is some 64,000 square miles, rather more than one-half of that of Italy or than two-thirds that of Great Britain. It forms a low-lying tract, a land of arable, marsh and forest, divided by no great barriers, traversed by two considerable rivers, and nowhere remote from the sea. Historically, while the earlier phases of their history differed not a little, from 1795 to 1917 and from 1920 to the present day all have followed the same course. Conquest by Russia, which began with the eighteenth century, was completed before its close, so that the nineteenth spoke of her "Baltic Provinces." Since peace was restored after the Great War, all have been orderly and progressive republics, none with less than a

million citizens and none reaching three million. Collectively, in September 1939 the population of between five and six million was about twice that of Norway, a land of twice their size.

These few rough data etch the outline of a problem immensely significant for mankind. The three republics are undoubtedly small and poor. None is as large or as populous as Eire. Their density of population is only about two-thirds of hers, nor can they count, as she can, on the sympathy of millions of expatriated sons. But their nationalist feeling appears to be unsurpassable, and in twenty years of independence they have all achieved remarkable results. Have such communities a moral right to independent statehood? And if such a right is conceded, will human society make it good? The world-wide problem of the small State appears upon the Baltic in its present form.

Nowhere, indeed, can States be more perfectly based upon nationality. Although the Latvians and Lithuanians are cousins, their languages are distinct and their historic evolution has followed a different course. In the first year of the thirteenth century, German adventurers founded a bishopric at Riga, whence Crusaders and merchants spread far and wide. While the Hanse League occupied the chief ports and cities, the christianised countryfolk became serfs of the "Baltic Barons," German squires who

maintained their dominion until the twentieth century. Thus while the shrunken Lithuania of to-day was part of a vast empire which joined with Poland, the lands that we know as Estonia and Latvia obeyed several overlords in succession, with no loosening of the Barons' grip upon their people. They therefore accepted from their masters the Lutheran form of faith, while Lithuania tardily changed from pagan to Roman Catholic. In the northern provinces the native peoples were handled on colonial lines, the "superior" race retaining wealth, patronage and power, while the "inferior" acted as their servants. Since the unit was the estate, often of vast extent, and the races seldom intermingled, the Estonians continued to cover the north and the Letts the south of the countryside. A line running almost east and west through Walka in the latitude of Pskov (approximately that of Aberdeen) divided and divides the Estonians with their Finnish origin and language from the Indo-European Letts, whose tongue resembles Sanskrit. In these conditions, the native races existing merely to serve their German masters, and, since 1721, Russia being supreme, Estonian and Lettish progress was necessarily of the slowest. A century ago, the social state of these two peoples was minutely described by J. G. Kohl, a German observer who hoped that his grandchildren might see them re-

united in the Great German League. He estimated that 5 per cent. of their population was German; 3 per cent. Russian; 1.5 per cent. Jewish, and 9.4 per cent. Swedish. Their whole constitution, he declared, was thoroughly German, only such minor officials as tax-gatherers and police being Russian. It was too late to exalt their dialects into civilised languages, and the natives more and more aped the Germans. Their recent emancipation (thanks to tsarist interference) had improved their condition but little, for the masters could still contrive to keep them on the estates and were now free to banish them if they chose to do so. Both races, like the Russian serfs, escaped from their sorrows with the aid of brandy. The Estonians, though the more energetic, lived in filthy hovels, and were rude and repellent in manner. Both peoples, like all enslaved tribes, were prone to petty theft.

The uncultivated Germans, Kohl complained, despised their serfs, forgetting that they had made them what they were. The southerners (Letts), he contended, were naturally clever, quick, intelligent and inventive, but unceasing labour kept their qualities dormant. "They have never even formed a village, much less a city or a state," he declared. Many restrictions on other races to the profit of the Germans were still preserved. Thus the municipal privileges of the citizens of Riga were defended

against the Russians by the terms of its capitulation of 1710. No Russian might become a citizen or even open a shop within the walls. In consequence, some 30,000 Lutherans seemed, as it were, besieged by 20,000 Russians, who dwelt in suburbs just outside the city. The Jews, except south of Riga, were forbidden to remain in any town for more than twenty-four hours. Where they dwelt they practised many trades and handicrafts, and often ruined the natives by supplying brandy on credit. They were expert smugglers and a race not to be banished by abundant edicts. In 1840 a great attempt at deporting them to Southern Russia had been made.

A century ago, rye was the chief product of the country, in addition to the far-famed flax which came from the regions east and south of Riga. Grain which appeared in May was reaped in July, at night because the night dews closed the ears and prevented the corn from falling out.

What most impressed the traveller was the affluence and leisure of the Baltic Barons' life. "The corn, the fruit, the vegetables grow up around them, without their troubling themselves." The natives baked, brewed and roasted for them, the merchant sent sugar, wine and coffee, the steward and attorney saw to business, the physician brought weekly lists of sick and dead peasants, secretaries, foresters and magistrates presented their accounts, the great man

gave audience and uttered decrees like an independent sovereign. To many, hunting, in its unrivalled variety and magnificence, was the greatest thing in life.

Kohl's vivid and convincing picture of the obstacles to be overcome suggests the strength of the long-latent capacity of the down-trodden races for progress. Generations later, it is true, the rising nationalism of Russia revolted against the Baltic Barons' independence. Efforts were made to russianise the religion, education and society of the Baltic provinces, and in 1905 revolt shook the Baltic aristocracy as elsewhere it shook the Russian throne. But the main cause of the transformation within three generations of the society described by Kohl into the civilised progressive national republics of to-day was undoubtedly the pent-up force of the Estonian and Lettish races.

In modern Lithuania, where a different race, with a different historical development, has achieved a similar result, the essential factors of change may perhaps be observed most clearly.

Lithuania, with a slightly larger population than Latvia and double that of thinly-peopled Estonia, differed in many ways from its northern neighbours. They had never given their name to a great empire such as the Lithuania of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. They possessed towns, largely German

or Jewish, but no city of the rank of Vilnius,¹ a centre of government, of religion, of learning and of civilisation. They lay open to the sea with numerous ports, while Lithuania was almost entirely landlocked, and Memel, at the outflow of her great river, lay in Prussia. They bore the impress of Germany; she, of Poland. Whereas Estonians were almost wholly Lutheran and in Latvia the great majority held that faith, nine-tenths of the Lithuanians were Roman Catholic. Paradoxically enough, landlocked Lithuania had sent half a million or more of her sons to live beyond the seas, while from the northern provinces comparatively few emigrants crossed the sea. In England Letts were hardly known except through the Sidney Street crime, when a nest of murderers suffered a military siege in London. Lastly, although for some six score years before the Great War all three lands had been ruled by Russia, Lithuania alone, as bordering on Eastern Prussia, had in some sense another model before her eyes. German aspirations, indeed, centred first on Lithuania, though they extended to the Gulf of Finland and beyond it. It is curious to see that in 1919 a well-informed Swiss writer² could declare that the mission of Lithuania was to maintain peace in Europe by defending her frontiers against her

¹ To the Russians "Vilna" and to the Poles "Wilno."

² Dr. J. Ehret: *La Lituanie* (Geneva and Paris), p. 434.

neighbours Germany and Russia, effecting also, like a northern Switzerland, a cultural *rapprochement* between two great civilisations.

Students of Lithuania agree that the race, with many virtues and talents, is difficult to comprehend. Tenacity both in love and hate is an outstanding characteristic, and it would be strange indeed if their long and melancholy history had left the people unaffected. A village race, for in their towns Jews and foreigners congregate, they, like the Scandinavians, mingle humdrum cares with romantic aspirations. A keen student¹ finds them prone to act rather by impulse than by reason, self-contradictory but by nature richly endowed, until lately a century behind the Germans, but fast striding forward in civilisation. Independence at once widened their opportunities for artistic creation, and called into being a national theatre, opera and school of music. Within thirteen years, three schools of painting emerged.

For the present, however, it is more possible and perhaps more profitable to investigate the achievements of independent Lithuania in politics and in the economic field. Since August 6, 1922, she has had three constitutions, the third *octroyée* ("granted") May 12, 1938.² Their dominant principles, it is

¹ Dr. Victor Jungfer: *Hinter den Seen* (Königsberg, 1932); *Litauen* (Leipzig, 1938).

² *Constitution de la Lituanie* (Kaunas, 1938).

claimed, express the basic character and the aspirations of the people, to whom all sovereignty belongs. The State serves the common weal, not private interests ; it is a republic of free citizens assured of justice and of the right to hold private property. "Lithuania," she officially declares, "always keeps her word, but expects her own rights to be respected." Thus she confessedly shares the ideals of western rather than of eastern Europe. Her constitutional evolution has tended to make the President of the Republic independent of the Assembly. Elected or re-elected for seven years by the representatives of the nation, he appoints both a Premier and a "State Controller." The Premier presents to him other Ministers ; and, to validate his acts, the Premier or the Minister interested must countersign them. The President approves the draft budget, wields the right of pardon, names and dismisses the commander-in-chief and many civil officials, summons the Assembly and, if he disagrees with a bill or with a plan for a new constitution, forthwith proclaims a dissolution. In the ordinary course, all citizens aged at least twenty-four years elect, by direct equal and secret voting, deputies of thirty years at least. The Assembly sits for five years, and Proportional Representation prevails. Work is commended as the life-blood of the State and the object of its all-pervading care. Religion, if not directed against

the State, is amply recognised, and, where practicable, is included in the education provided at the public expense. The tribunals enjoy complete independence.

"The aim of the State," writes an official interpreter, "is to organise life so that every citizen can rise to the highest moral and material level, and can share in creating those values which are demanded by the progress of the individual, the nation and all mankind."

In practice, during the first twenty years of independence, this high aim has been pursued chiefly through the reconstruction of order and the promotion of agriculture.

From 1795 to 1915 Lithuania had been ruled by Russia, that is, by an alien and backward Power hostile to her nationality, culture and religion, and intent only on Russian security and profit. Memel, her sole natural outlet to the sea, was in German hands. Russian police-lines many miles in depth guarded her customs frontier, and her roads and railways were planned by a strategy which often dictated the absence of communications. In 1915 the Germans occupied the country with the design of controlling it for ever. "Not even Belgium suffered more," declares a semi-official survey.¹ The German military occupation cost Lithuania

¹ Lithuanian Tourist Association.

25 per cent. of her forests, nearly all her live stock, ruined her industry, swept her bare.”¹ After the Armistice, independent Lithuania had several years of confused warfare before her frontiers were determined, Memel (Klaipėda) remaining in her hands (1923–1939), and Vilnius or Vilna in those of Poland (1920–1939). Until 1938, moreover, she sacrificed prosperity to pride by closing the long Lithuanian-Polish frontier.

Despite these handicaps and the difficulty of securing at the first attempt a perfect-fitting constitution, Lithuania made steady progress in economic organisation. This meant above all else the organisation of agriculture, which before the war had occupied more than 70 per cent. of the population. Not only were the farms depleted of their resources in men, beasts, fertilisers, fuel and even tools, but four-fifths of their area still followed the system of strip cultivation by the whole village community. The mediocre water-logged soil, the primitive means of communication, and the lack of capital for improvements hampered production. Before the war, good flax had been grown and many pit ponies exported, but in cereals and potatoes the harvest

¹ A closer estimate indicates that horses were diminished by 38 per cent. ; cattle, 48 per cent. ; swine, 44 per cent., and sheep, 30 per cent. ; and the best were taken. Over 50,000 buildings were destroyed. Dr. J. Krikščiūnas : *Agriculture in Lithuania* (Kaunas, 1938).

had amounted only to one-half of that of neighbouring East Prussia. Lithuania received no compensation for war damage, but she had the strength which comes from self-sufficiency and from the tenacity which clung to paganism until almost modern times and declared even in 1938 that Vilnius (Vilna) remained the capital. By the labour of the smaller farmers' own hands, a great measure of restoration was effected within four years.

The high birth-rate, the collapse of many great estates, and the fact that many of their owners had fought against Lithuania, helped to dictate the Agrarian Reform resolved on in 1923. By 1930, farms of 50 to 170 acres occupied just one-half of the whole agricultural area, which was divided into 287,380 separate farms. Almost nine-tenths of the land belonged to those who farmed it. They themselves supplied 750,000 labourers, while less than 120,000 were hired hands.

Inspired by the obvious necessity of aiding its own production, the peasant State bent all its energy and scanty wealth to repair and education. Roads, railways, credit societies, a land bank, an equitable plan of land taxation, export premiums in times of crisis, well-calculated and all-pervasive education extending even to the provision of clubs for young farmers and the subvention of agricultural organisations—these hammered at the central problem from

every side. The abundant capital necessary for so draining and fertilising the soil as to make it rival that of Holland, Denmark and Britain, indeed, is lacking, but the yield surpasses that of Rumania, Spain and Greece, and tends to rise. Cottage industries have been established and great controlling unions set up. The guiding principle is co-operation and guaranteed high quality; while the dominant trend has been to send butter and bacon to Britain.

A recent survey¹ shows that within ten years the volume of production has doubled. Autarchy, the licence system and co-operative trading, together with a sound currency and credit policy, have thus collectively proved victorious over the world economic crisis. As compared with 1929, world production rose in eight years by 2.5 per cent. and Lithuanian by 172.0 per cent. The aggregate indeed is small. The number of undertakings employing at least five persons rose only to 1,247, and the workers to not quite 32,000, with a total engine power of 125,000 h.p. The value of the goods produced in 1937 exceeded 428 million litas (c. £14,700,000).

Of this two-thirds was due to foodstuffs and luxury goods, textiles and the timber industry.

¹ *Ten Years of Lithuanian Economy*. Report of the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Crafts (Kaunas, 1938).

Of world trade turnover, the share of Lithuania was less than one-seventhundredth, but in flax her exports were 4·66 per cent., in live pigs 6·60 per cent., and in bacon and butter about one-fortieth. As chief customer Britain, displacing Germany, received almost half the total exports, butter, bacon and flax the chief among them.

These facts and figures, like all that Lithuanians and their friends write about the country, indicate a fraternal and industrious community bent on maintaining order and hygiene and excelling in education.

The same note reverberates throughout Latvia and Estonia, and indeed through every small Power on the Baltic. It by no means excludes pride in artistic achievement, which distinguishes Lithuania and Latvia, or in music, where Estonia ranks particularly high. Although industry, outside agricultural and timber products, is relatively small, it is far from negligible and is developing under the best possible conditions. These States, therefore, present in its purest form the outstanding problem of the modern Baltic—can freedom be secured for a small, law-abiding, industrious, inoffensive people?

Moving northwards from Lithuania, chiefly the Samogitia of earlier days, the traveller passes first into what were once Courland and Semigalia, shaped like a miniature Czechoslovakia, south of the river

Dvina, and thence into southern Livonia and Latgalia. These four provinces form the land of the Letts, or Latvia. While the outlines of the countryside remain Lithuanian, an open landscape, somewhat rising, the clustering villages with their gay cottage gardens now give place to solitary farms, and the Roman Catholic churches gradually yield to the Lutheran. Although the population is not quite so great, cities are more prominent, and the long seaboard with its considerable ports reduces the sense of remoteness from the western world.

Upon the country of the Letts, then comprising chiefly the Russian government of Courland and the southern part of that of Livonia, the Great War inflicted many of its sharpest torments. The inhabitants went to war with enthusiasm, hating their German oppressors, and, by enabling East Prussia to be invaded with unexpected speed, they helped Paris to resist the onslaught of 1914. After Tannenberg, however, Courland was overrun, but for more than two years the Russian front remained unbroken and the Germans were unable to cross the Dvina. Meanwhile the Letts were scattered far and wide. Two-thirds of the inhabitants of Courland left the country. Riga was first deprived for some three years of shipping activity, and then, so far as possible, rendered useless to the Germans before they entered it in September 1917. Meanwhile, however, a

Lettish army had been formed to fight for Russia, and a Lettish National Council claimed support from Lettish patriots wherever they might be found. The Russian revolution of March 1917, with its liberal view of nationalist autonomy, could not fail to rouse wider hopes. The seed sown by the literary Lettish nationalists of the last two generations and by the anti-tsarist rebels of 1905, thus matured during the dispersal.

Lettish and Estonian aspirations were kindled by the same fires. The "Government" of Estonia, and that northern part of Livonia which was inhabited by the Estonian race, were not, indeed, the scene of any considerable fighting or wholesale evacuation. But one-seventh of the population was conscripted and, after many distinguished feats of arms by individuals, an Estonian army was formed in 1917, to obey the autonomous administration. Next year, the Estonians, like the Letts, were subjugated by the Germans, but from abroad their representatives maintained the claim to independence and secured the sympathy of the Allies. This was more readily afforded because Bolshevism menaced the democratic republic which the great majority of the Estonians were eager to obey. In February 1918 they freed themselves from a short-lived Bolshevik reign of terror, but in December, after the Germans had withdrawn, a ghastly inroad of Red savages

threatened Reval (Tallinn). Early in 1919, however, they were driven off, the triumph of Charles XII at Narva being repeated against far heavier Russian odds.

In February 1919, however, the immature Estonian Government, terribly embarrassed by home-grown Bolsheviks, had to endure a better organised invasion both in the north and south. At this time the Latvian Government, in still greater straits, had fled to Libau, while Latvia was received into the Soviet system. But the Estonians, aided by Finns, Russian "Whites," and Lettish patriots, beat off their own assailants and entered Latvia, where German forces co-operated in driving the Bolsheviks towards the south-east. Then, in this "insensate quadrille," it fell to the united Letts and Estonians twice to defeat the Germans, eager to regain their former domination, and further successes against the Bolsheviks were recorded. War at least disclosed the talents of the Estonian General Laidoner, and in Latvia the scientific agriculturist and versatile patriot Karlis Ulmanis gained the abiding confidence of the nation. Both peoples were visibly advancing towards domestic unity, peace with the Bolsheviks and recognition by the Western Powers. In August 1920 peace with the Soviet was signed.

The parallel between the history of independent Latvia and independent Lithuania is striking. From

the religious, racial and linguistic points of view, indeed, Latvia is less homogeneous than her southern neighbour. Both have no official religion, but, while more than half the Latvians are Lutheran, nearly one-fourth are Romanist, and nearly one-tenth Greek Orthodox, these last being chiefly Russians. Letts, however, form a full three-quarters of the Latvian population. The great majority live by agriculture. That industry is carried on, as in Lithuania, by a mass of peasant proprietors, recently made such by law. It is directed in a high degree to the supply of Britain, notably with butter, flax and timber. Latvia, moreover, rivals Lithuania in her zeal for education. From a population of some 2,000,000, more than 170,000 attend primary schools; about 23,000 secondary schools; and some 7,000 the national university at Riga. Politically, in Latvia as in Lithuania, a republic based on the broadest democracy was at once established, with countless parties and proportional representation. Here also, as in other new democracies, Poland not least among them, a legislature thus elected failed to satisfy the needs of the nation, and with the approval of public opinion was set aside. In Latvia the change was made by the bloodless *coup d'état* of May 15, 1934, when Ulmanis caused his opponents to be arrested by night, and seized the reins of government. The new National Leader established closer co-operation

with Estonia and Lithuania, arranged for the settlement of the unpaid Riga debt, and initiated an economic council of the nation in place of the former legislature, where in fifteen years a score of cabinets had taken office.

The chief difference between Latvia and Lithuania arose from the fact that while the latter had Germany for a neighbour, Latvia for centuries had been dominated by Germans under Russian rule. Through her ports, moreover, Russian exports and imports had been wont to flow and intercourse with distant lands was carried on. In music, art and science her achievement may well be higher and in politics her outlook wider than is to be expected from her neighbours north and south.

Unquestionably a distinct nationality, and one whose boundaries none could call in question, the Letts felt a certain sense of injury that established States were slow to accord them recognition. The influence of Mr. Lloyd George and M. Briand was needed to induce the Supreme Council of the Allies to recognise Latvia and Estonia in January 1921, and until July 1922 the United States delayed following suit. Apart from the devastation of the country, whose population by 1916 fell from 2,500,000 to 1,300,000, and despite the suspicions due to the fame of Lettish regiments as Bolshevist terrorists, the Foreign Offices of the great States inevitably

disliked the complications involved by the disruption of an empire, while full sovereignty establishes rights which in unworthy hands may be oppressive.

Latvia, however, strove ardently to gain an unblemished international reputation. As her spokesmen claim,¹ she has invariably striven to collaborate faithfully with the Western Powers, with the League of Nations, with Estonia and Lithuania, and with the Baltic countries as a whole. Herself without the smallest temptation towards aggression, she has negotiated persistently though with small success for local unions to keep the peace, and has signed such instruments as the Geneva Protocol, the general act of arbitration, and the Kellogg Pact. In 1936, as the representative of the triple Baltic *entente*, she was elected to the Council of the League.

Estonia, the most northerly and the smallest of the "Baltic" republics, only two-thirds as large as Eire, with a population creeping from 1,100,000 to 1,200,000 at the annual rate of 0·2 per cent., arrived on the political map of Europe from a darkness even denser than Lithuania or Latvia. As a Frenchman² wittily observed, "One fine day Reval was proclaimed a capital and called Tallinn. The newspaper reader asked no questions, the geographer

¹ Bērziņš-Valdēss et Vidbergs : *Lettonie* (Riga, 1938).

² Jean Cathala : *Portrait de l'Estonie* (Paris, 1937).

corrected his atlas, and Larousse put down three more colours on his page of flags." But it meant that the "human animal," who had twice been forced by his German conqueror to change his religion, and who owed whatever rights he had to the Swedish or Russian overlords—that this frustrated individual was set free by the Armistice to build, if he could, an independent State of freemen.

He began the fight for independence, it is true, with certain assets. His masters for some seven centuries, for two of these the German "Barons" and the Russian Tsars, had suddenly been dashed from power. Germany and Russia were in the throes of revolution, and few supposed that Bolshevism was more than a passing aberration. Fully three years later, a sincere and well-informed student of Baltic problems¹ could say that, while Britain wavered and procrastinated, France and Poland were perfecting their plans for the domination of Eastern Europe, the essential prelude to the "economic stranglehold" for which they hoped. The Estonian, it is probable, had never lost all memory of his forefathers' brave and stubborn fight against the crusaders. He had fought again, in 1905, against the reactionary forces which threatened his recent progress, and in the Great War he had done well. In Constantine Pāts and General Laidoner

¹ E. J. Harrison : *Lithuania* (1922), p. 205.

native leaders for peace and war stood before him. No national home could be more clearly traced than his, unless it were an island. The 18,000 square miles of his racial heritage on two sides had the Baltic ; on the east, great lakes and a mighty river ; and on the south, a frontier which the sharpest of linguistic cleavages made unmistakable. Within these boundaries, some nine-tenths of the population was Estonian, and all but an insignificant handful understood the Estonian language. Nearly four-fifths were Lutherans, and the vast majority of the remainder Greek Orthodox, while Jews and Roman Catholics numbered in all less than 7,000. Famous for stubbornness and hardihood as well as for poetry and song, the race was gifted with a grim humour which helped it to assess the fantastic Bolshevik claims. "There is your Paradise : enter it," said the guards who conducted Estonian Bolsheviks to the Russian frontier, and drove them from the land.

Politically and economically, the history of independent Estonia runs closely parallel with that of Lithuania and Latvia, and, on its smaller scale, bears comparison with that of Poland. It is the story of a Western race, poor and long-oppressed, now seeking happiness and self-fulfilment by way of peace, toil, education, toleration, social justice and complete democracy. The poverty of the emancipated society compels the State to interfere in industry to

an extent abnormal in western Europe. This use of governmental power, the lack of political training, the burden of armaments imposed by distrust, the shocks that a world crisis can give to weak communities—all these make complete democracy too complex and indecisive for their needs, and the leading patriots were impelled towards revolution.

When Estonia became independent, 58 per cent. of the land was in the hands of landowners whose average holding exceeded 5,300 acres.¹ Of these estates 30 per cent. was leased to about 23,000 tenants, in return for labour services. The remaining 42 per cent. of the agricultural land belonged to some 51,600 peasants, who had an average holding of less than 90 acres. Of the great estates, one-fifth were ruined and abandoned by their owners, while the prevailing devastation threatened to render all agriculture even less productive than before. Faced both with want and with the danger from external and internal Bolshevism, the Constituent Assembly, on October 10, 1919, nationalised more than 96 per cent. of the area of the great estates. In March 1926 the expropriated owners were awarded compensation for their live stock and machinery. Next year, the League of Nations authorised a sterling loan of £700,000 and \$4,000,000 at 7 per cent., to enable the currency to be reformed. Estonians boast

¹ *Estonia*, ed. A. Pullerits (Tallinn, 1937).

with justice that this is the only League loan of which the terms agreed on have been fulfilled precisely.

Aided by currency reform and a strong central bank, the careful management of the new State has been rewarded by conspicuous success. Although her war debts still remain unpaid, Estonia invariably presents a balanced budget. Her commerce and industry, she claims,¹ have been completely modernised, and show consistent progress. Communications and defence absorb more than half the revenue, while about one-ninth is spent on education. Like her sister republics, Estonia finds her chief outlet in the supply of foodstuffs to Britain, though Germany receives about a quarter of her total exports. Among her natural riches, oil-shale stands foremost, surpassing 150,000 tons per annum, and moving towards half a million. Wood industry and phosphates are also of importance, while peat-bogs cover one-seventh of the countryside, and the rivers may furnish more than five times their present yield of 35,000 kw, of power. The State owns some four-fifths of the Estonian forests, which comprise 21 per cent. of the Republic, and all the minerals underground are exploited for the nation by the Ministry of Economic Affairs.

The zeal of the Estonians for the service of their

¹ The Estonian Minister, and others, in *The Banker* (March 1938).

State can hardly be better shown than by their voluntary unions for its defence. Every fit male is enrolled in the army between the ages of seventeen and fifty-five, with one year's active service, normally at twenty. Yet a territorial organisation, mainly unpaid, exists to aid the authorities, to give help in public calamities and to promote the physical and moral development of the army. Behind this organisation stand patriotic leagues of women, boys and girls.

The dominant note of patriotism, progress and co-operation in Estonia, however, has not drowned murmurs against the workings of the complete democracy with which the independent State began. The change from the pre-war system of great estates to a widely diffused peasant proprietorship has naturally caused a reaction against Socialism. At the same time proportional representation has given rise to a multitude of party groups, which bargain for power and install swiftly changing Cabinets. The peasant voter looks for a national leader and finds a multitude of paid deputies, whose principles and personal integrity he may suspect. In December 1924 a Communist uprising, inspired from Moscow but suppressed by the army, gave the signal for a Coalition Government and a demand for constitutional reform. Parliament clung to its rights, and in 1930 a show of peasant opposition to

its absolutism was put down. Next year, the so-called Liberators, ex-combatants, demanded a President with extensive powers. They wished to vote for single candidates in place of lists, and to reduce the membership of the Assembly.

After a confused struggle between Liberators, Agrarians and Social Democrats, bills for the creation of a President and reduction of the Assembly were twice defeated by referendum (1932-1933). In the autumn of 1933, however, the Liberators gained the verdict of the voters by a majority of more than 5:2, and Päts headed a non-party Government. Thenceforward the nation was to elect for five years a President, who, with the aid of a Cabinet and officials of his own choosing, would really rule the State. The Assembly was reduced to fifty members, and it could be adjourned or dissolved by the President.

In March 1934 Päts, the acting President, suddenly declared martial law, arrested many of the Liberators for conspiracy, and adjourned the elections. Early next year he proclaimed a corporative system, headed by an Economic Council of twenty-five, and a Government-approved single party. In January 1936 a plan for a bicameral Assembly was approved by a referendum by more than 3:1. The first chamber was to be democratically elected by eighty single member con-

stituencies, while to the second the President nominated ten members ; and corporations, churches and other public bodies thirty more.

In 1937 the Assembly, in which the opposition element was small, established a constitution strongly resembling the Latvian with regard to the President and his powers. The Chamber of Deputies was reduced to 48 members and the National Council enlarged to 40. The minimum age for voters was fixed at 22 ; for deputies, at 25 ; and for Councillors, at 40. Laws might be introduced by the Government with the President's sanction, or by one-fifth of the Deputies, and three-fifths of the Deputies could override the Council's veto. In April 1938, by an immense majority, Päts became the first President.

As a State among States, Estonia has four obvious peculiarities. Her small acreage and population impose on her a policy, at almost any price, of peace. A rural people with the population of Bombay or Barcelona in half the area of Czechoslovakia cannot afford adventures. If she undertook them as the ally of either of the Baltic Great Powers, even success would hazard her independence. Like Latvia, she has small States to north and south, and in one of them there dwells a kindred race. The Gulf of Finland is not broad ; three or four hours from Tallinn brings the Estonian among his cousins of Helsinki. With two sea frontiers, four ports and

a modest hinterland, she is distinctly the most maritime of the Baltic States, and the most keenly interested in the Baltic waterway. Above all, she forms the natural gateway into Russia.

No Soviet seclusion can obliterate the facts that Narva lies within 100 miles of Leningrad, that the line from Moscow and Pskov terminates in an Estonian port, or in Latvian ports reached through Estonia, and that Estonia was formerly the larder and the workshop of adjacent Russia. The ostentatious benevolence of early Soviet policy towards her may well have been due to the impotence and peril of the Bolsheviks, to their courtship of the Western Powers and to their hope or expectation that in time the Estonians would bolshevise themselves.

During the first dozen years of her independence, Estonia was naturally preoccupied with domestic organisation of every kind. Germany was still disarmed, and although the Bolsheviks maintained themselves in Russia the prestige of the League of Nations stood high. With the Baltic open, the Western Powers could give prompt and effective help to the States upon its shores in case of an eastern invasion. In these conditions, the obvious course for Estonia was defensive alliance with neighbours of her own rank which, like herself, were zealous adherents of Geneva. For several years, various plans for mutual assurance and disarmament were

discussed, but all failed to secure the necessary unanimity. Distrust of Soviet good faith ranked with the insistence of Lithuania upon her claims to Vilna in causing this failure. Early in 1924, however, Estonia and Latvia made a treaty of close defensive alliance which is still in force. The Estonian communist rising of December 1924 stimulated negotiations both for a four-power pact with Poland and for a triple league of the three Baltic republics. The fact that Poland continued to hold Vilna, however, enabled the Soviet to draw Lithuania into a separate non-aggression treaty in September 1926, which was followed in 1927 by a Soviet-Latvian commercial treaty. Early in 1929, thanks to the assiduous diplomacy of Litvinov, the Baltic States south of the Gulf of Finland, together with Rumania, Turkey and Persia, signed a protocol renouncing war. Three years later, Finland, Latvia and Estonia successively concluded with the Soviet mutual pacts of non-aggression which are due to expire at the end of 1945.

Meanwhile the world economic crisis had impoverished and unsettled every Baltic and other European State. In January 1933 the Nazi party gained control of Germany. Their victory put an end to German-Soviet understanding, for they claimed that Germany was Europe's bulwark against Communism, and their leader talked of con-

quering the Ukraine. Next year, in place of the "Eastern Locarno" advocated by France and the Soviet, Germany made a non-aggression pact with Poland and herself reintroduced conscription. Under Hitler's leadership, she was now antagonistic to the League of Nations, and she could not be expected to view with indifference the retention of Memel, a town largely peopled by Germans, under the ægis of Lithuania. In these circumstances the Soviet Union concluded pacts of mutual assistance with Czechoslovakia and France (May 1935). Immediately afterwards, Britain and Germany came to a naval understanding. The tonnage of the German fleet was not to exceed 35 per cent. of the British. But such a new-built fleet could count on mastery of the Baltic, since Kiel and its canal were German. Thenceforward the smaller Baltic States, already overshadowed by the Soviet, lay between the hammer and the anvil.

While Germany grew every year more formidable, moreover, the League, as a potential protector of the smaller States, palpably declined. This was made manifest by the war which Italy, a member of the League, planned against Abyssinia, and which the League completely failed to check. The Baltic riparian States, from Poland downwards, numbered more than 50,000,000 people, and with their young and agricultural population could perhaps rival Germany in man-power. But in wealth and

armaments, in strategic position and in unity of command they must be hopelessly inferior to the central and centralised Great Power. Worse still, as years of negotiation had shown, they were too deeply divided in outlook and interest to form a multiple alliance. Finland had no fear of Germany; Sweden was all for neutrality; Denmark deemed it hopeless to construct anti-German defences; Lithuania abjured all intercourse with Poland; Poland aspired to self-maintained independence. In the Baltic, as in the Balkans, a solid union against Soviet or German aggression seemed impossible, while the southern Baltic at least lay beyond the reach of the Western forces.

A relative security, however, flowed from the Soviet-German antithesis. As long as Hitler insisted that Bolshevism was the enemy of civilisation, the Bolshevists could be invoked against his aggressions, as he against any deviation in Europe from their ostentatious policy of peace. Estonia and her sister republics, therefore, tacitly abjured high politics. Within their own boundaries they continued to seek for order, prosperity, education, and, under Government direction, a largely self-sufficient organisation. By economy and industry they overcame the effects of the economic shocks of the early 'thirties, and, without losing their German connexion, gained a strong position in mutual trade

with Britain. Her demand for wood products, butter and bacon, together with a rise in world prices for these commodities, brought them a modicum of free exchange, and, during peace, a stable market. In recent years, however, Britain has insisted upon a closer approach to parity between her exports and imports than prevailed before the crisis.

In these conditions, the events of 1939 shattered the whole basis of their prosperity and safety. The bargain with the Soviet at their expense, declined by France and Britain, was made by Germany. Poland, which had by threats obtained the resumption of an intercourse that many Lithuanians welcomed, was obliterated from the map of eastern Europe. The three States found themselves at the mercy of the Soviet, which, for the moment, contented itself with the creation of servitudes upon their soil for its armed forces. Germany had already wrested Memel from Lithuania, which had made the port her chief industrial centre. The Soviet gratified her pride but not her prosperity by restoring Vilnius or Vilna, though it kept back the strong centre of Grodno and the textiles of Bialystok. At the same time the two Powers made war in such a fashion as practically to deny to any neutral the safe navigation of the Baltic. This, it would seem, must destroy, for the duration of the war at least, the economic structure which the three republics have built up.

CHAPTER III

FINLAND

IN reviewing the recent history of the Estonians, Letts and Lithuanians, a student may well enquire why their group lacks the Finns. North of the narrow Gulf of Finland lies the frontier of a race as nearly akin to the Estonians as are the Letts to the Lithuanians. Like these three, it is small in numbers, republican in government, and highly civilised. The Finns, like their southern neighbours, are Lutherans pent up in the Baltic, and they, like all three Baltic States, have lately been emancipated from Russia. So far as any answer can be given, it is, first, that the primitive Finns were not conquered by Germans or governed by the Poles, but conquered, governed, and in part begotten by the Swedes, and, second, that the vast granitic plain on which they live has, in the course of many centuries, shaped a somewhat different breed of men.

Until the nineteenth century, the Finns were numbered rather by the hundred thousand than by the million, and to-day they are less than four million strong. Such a population, in a country

thrice as spacious as England and endowed with a long coastline and countless lakes, must be amphibious and hardy, skilled in tillage and timber-work, and able to cope with any rural task. In latitudes which produce a short, hot summer and a winter that is lengthy, dark and cold, man becomes by turns intensely strenuous and torpid, his livelihood depending on the sustained activity of a few months in the year. A certain sluggish strength, with rustic honesty and rare but formidable rage, have been traditionally the attributes of the Finn, together with a yeoman's stubborn independence. In later days, he and his womenfolk have gained high renown for athletics and the arts, for widespread education and social and political leadership.

Finland until recent years has been so remote and sparsely peopled that under almost any régime the Finns, like the Siberians, must have enjoyed considerable freedom. When in 1809 she was detached from Sweden by Alexander I, it was as a Grand Duchy, by no means submerged in the mass of Russian provinces with their prevailing serfdom. Finland though not sovereign was autonomous and, as an earnest of his good intentions, the Tsar restored to her the south-eastern regions conquered in 1721 and 1743. This retrocession of the Viborg district lent substance to the imperial declaration of 1816 that both the civil and political laws of the

Finns had been maintained so that they might feel themselves not conquered but endowed with clear advantages by Russia.

Finland thus received a Governor-General with a Council of State and a special committee at St. Petersburg, which lay only some twenty miles from her frontier. During the liberal years of Alexander II, after the Crimean War, this favoured position was improved by the revival of the Finnish Diet (1863). The Finnish language gained official status, and the Finmark replaced the Russian rouble. These privileges and that of fiscal independence were lightly given to a poor and sparse population, of which the small Swedish fraction alone seemed dangerous. In Helsinki the statue of the "Tsar Liberator" still stands.

In Finland, however, Russian tolerance nourished a growth more formidable to Russia than any relics of pro-Swedish feeling among the Finns. Not only did the relatively free industrious and educated Finnish race more than double its numbers and wealth during the nineteenth century: it also developed a powerful sense of nationality. Thus the new Russian nationalists were confronted at the very gates of Russia by a small people under their own Tsar who flourished by supplying them with goods but rejected all Russian immigrants and institutions. While Russia, despite her imposing

schemes, remained a poor and backward country Finland developed her own waterways, railways, and factories, and took rank as a pioneer in higher civilisation. In 1899 the Russian nationalists had their way. The Finnish constitution was suspended and General Bobrikov, as Governor-General, received almost unlimited powers.

The Finns understood well enough what this portended. A tsar instead of a grand duke, service in the Russian army, Russian as their official language, and Greek Orthodoxy as their religion, the East in place of the West—Bobrikov embodied all these evils. Avoiding futile rebellion, they appealed to the accession oath of Nicholas, secured the vain intercession of America and Europe, and defeated by passive resistance the attempt to make them Russian soldiers. Without maintaining that the constitution given by Alexander II was unchangeable, they claimed that it could be changed only by constitutional means. When appeal and argument proved fruitless, Bobrikov was assassinated (June 1904), and soon two other prominent representatives of reaction shared his fate. The Finnish official who slew first Bobrikov and then himself declared that the deed was his alone, and as a "most humble and obedient subject" begged the Tsar to enquire into the true state of Finland, Poland and the Baltic Provinces.

Such efforts to move the Russian Government were powerfully seconded by the fleet and army of Japan, and by the rebels in various parts of Russia during 1905. The panic which brought about the institution of the Russian Duma or Parliament also revived the Finnish Diet and procured for it a modern form based on universal suffrage. When peace was restored, however, the tsardom, rebuffed in the Far East, strove to play a greater part in the West and within its own dominions. In Russia proper, it was gratified by the steadfastness of the army and the rally of the middle class against the revolution. In Finland, it was shocked to find the Social Democrats by far the largest party, as the elections of April 1907 made clear. In Finland, as in Russia, those about the throne endeavoured to regain the lost prerogatives. The Finns were checked first by the use of the Grand Ducal veto, a lawful constitutional move, and, in 1908, by the interposition of the Imperial Council between Nicholas and the Diet, in defiance of the Finnish Constitution.

Again the civilised world was besought to save the Finns from threatened russification. In 1910, a bill was laid before the Duma which in effect would transform Finland into a Russian province. Russia, it was argued, now enjoyed a constitution, and separatism had lost its *raison d'être*. Three million of the Tsar's subjects, moreover, could no longer

be allowed to levy customs at a lower rate than the rest, or to enjoy all manner of special liberties. The jurists of Europe had no difficulty in deciding that by limiting his rights in Russia the Tsar gained no title to increase them in Finland, but the Duma passed the bill. Since 1898 the growth of the German navy had been overcoming even the recent antagonism between Britain and France, the ally of Russia, and on the morrow of the victory of Japan Britain sought a better understanding with Russia. In this domestic question of the Russian empire the Powers neither possessed nor sought a right to interfere. The Law of 1910 meant for Finland a Russian garrison, a russified Senate, immigration of Russians, Russian censorship, many Russian officials and, for recalcitrant Finns, a Russian prison.

The outbreak of the Great War changed nothing in the Finnish policy of Russia. While a modest band of Finns volunteered for Russian service, as many fled to fight with the Germans against the Tsar. Even more than in Sweden, as was natural, the educated classes in Finland regarded Germany as their spiritual home. To Finns, as to the Baltic Germans, she was "the south" for which the traveller longed and in which the upper middle class found stimulus and relaxation. The mass of the "workers," however, careless of foreign lands and international politics, shared in the prosperity which

the needs of warring Russia brought to virtually neutral Finland. As industry expanded, the Social Democrats increased, until, at an election held in 1916, the apathy of their opponents gave them a majority in the Diet.

When the Diet met, however, the abdication of Nicholas (March 1917) had wholly changed the Finnish situation. The Russian Liberals, who then took office, co-operated in restoring to Finland her constitution and her exiled sons. They could not, however, countenance separation, and many Finnish Social Democrats looked forward to the protection of a Social Democratic Finland by a Russia of the same complexion. In July 1917, none the less, the Diet, by a majority of nearly 5 to 2, claimed for itself the sovereignty which their Grand Duke had renounced. Russia could not agree, and the political tangle was further complicated by the Bolshevik revolution (November) and by a Finnish famine, due in part to the Allies' blockade. While the revolutionaries of Finland turned to Russia, her Moderates turned to Germany, and on December 6, 1917, declared their country independent. Bolshevik Russia, Sweden, France and Germany swiftly accorded recognition.

For a time, as in Estonia and Latvia, the Bolsheviks worked their will in Finland. The proletariat, both Russians and their Finnish protégés,

plundered, imprisoned or slaughtered the so-called bourgeois, and established a reign of terror in southern Finland, where the chief towns lie. The Government leaders fled to the west coast, and Baron Gustavus Mannerheim, a Finn of Swedish descent, who had gained distinction in the Russian cavalry, rallied and inspired the Finnish Whites. When the south was threatened with ruin and Sweden refused to furnish arms, the Whites appealed to Germany.

Early in March 1918 Germany promised her aid, requiring from Finland an undertaking to consult her before renouncing any sovereign right. With her assistance, Mannerheim swiftly broke the Red armies, and before the end of May reconquered all the south. The civil war had lasted some four months, and the grimmest stories of its cruelty pervaded Sweden. The triumphant Whites, with 80,000 prisoners to feed at a time when many districts were mingling birch-bark with their flour, set up special Courts of High Treason to try this multitude. In 1918 the ratio of convictions to acquittals exceeded nine to one, but only 125 convicted murderers suffered death. For the time being, the Social Democratic party was almost destroyed.

In the early summer of 1918, before the balance of the western war turned against the Germans, the Finns found themselves with a Regent, Mr. Svinhufvud,

former President of the Senate, a Diet, and a declaration of independence which envisaged a republic. They had also an understanding with Germany, and when Mannerheim, on being refused a free hand, resigned, the German von der Goltz came to organise the Finnish army. While he remained on guard against the Bolsheviks, the Diet elected the Kaiser's brother-in-law the first King of Finland.

This triumph of German propaganda, which represented Germany as victorious over Allies who had starved Finland and favoured Russia, was reversed by Germany's collapse. The German king-elect declined the offer. Soon after the Armistice, Svinhufvud resigned, and Mannerheim, a non-party patriot, was chosen Regent.

Few peoples can ever have faced greater difficulties than did the Finns at the dawn of 1919. Like much of Europe, Finland stood in danger of starvation. War raged on the side of Russia and soon threatened on the side of Sweden. Masses of "traitors" filled the concentration camps and gaols. The form of government had yet to be determined. The Regent or his successor must defend the State against Bolshevism, without and within, must secure recognition by foreign powers, must establish Finland's boundaries and, above all, must create a united nation.

As to the political complexion of the people, indeed, Mannerheim and the world were not long

left in doubt. Universal suffrage over twenty-three years of age with proportional representation must reveal the popular will, and in Finland the results have proved singularly stable. In the Constituent Assembly of April 1919, the Social Democrats reappeared as two-fifths of the voters. Three years later, one-third of the party declared themselves Communist. The smallest of the five chief parties was that of the class-conscious monarchist Swedes, comprising about one-eighth of the population. Between them came in 1919 the Agrarians, aiming at peasant proprietorship, the Finnish Coalition, who supported Mannerheim, and the Finnish Progressives, who desired a Liberal republic. As no party could gain a clear majority, coalitions and swiftly-changing cabinets fell to the lot of Finland as to the south-east Baltic states.

Meanwhile Finland had averted starvation by convincing the Allies that she was neither the Germans' nor the Bolsheviks' ally. A Finnish army based on conscription was decreed, but the Whites deemed it prudent not to disband their voluntary force. On the other hand, Mannerheim offended the "workers" by favouring intervention against the Russian Reds. His name helped Finland to secure general recognition, but, largely through the adverse influence of her claims to the Åland Isles, he failed to secure a four-power Scandinavian alliance.

The Islands question, the agrarian question and the question of peace and a frontier with Russia, survived the eclipse of Mannerheim in July 1919. But before this Finland had achieved the constitution upon which her later history turns. Based on the sovereignty of the people, whose rights, including the protection of health and labour-power, it is designed to secure, it provides for the exercise of that sovereignty through a single-chamber Diet, democratically elected for three years. The executive comprises a President and Cabinet, and in making the presidential power a reality Finland became a pioneer among the Baltic states. In legislation, indeed, as against the Diet the President had only a delaying veto, though administrative edicts, if countersigned ministerially, might come from him. With the budget, which must be balanced, he could not interfere, nor was he immune against impeachment. But a President who held office for six years, who could summon or dismiss the Diet, select the Cabinet, and control foreign policy, the army, navy and air force, was a monarch rather than a mere figure-head. Mannerheim received a nomination as the first President, only to be heavily defeated by Professor Ståhlberg, the Progressive leader and the architect of the new constitution.

Under Ståhlberg, Finland set herself to gain peace and a new frontier with Russia, and to solve the

question of the Åland Isles with Sweden. The Russian question was cleared by the departure of the British from Murmansk and by the subsequent collapse of the northern Whites. In October 1920, at Dorpat (Tartu) in Estonia, Finland abandoned the scanty kindred population of Eastern Carelia in return for a worthless promise that it should be fully autonomous. The Bolsheviks thereupon ceded Pechenga (Petsamo), an ice-free port, together with a territorial avenue to Finland, and withdrew all claim to the former Grand Duchy. The Finns could therefore look forward to peaceful intercourse with a neighbour whose former capital lay only 155 miles by rail and even less by sea from their own. Two months later their application for admission to the League of Nations was accepted.

The difficult question of the Åland Isles, one of the major problems of the Baltic, still remained unsolved. This archipelago of some 300 islands guards the entrance to the Gulf of Bothnia and has been termed the key to Stockholm. Thick-strewn from its western outposts to the Finnish coast, severed by thirty miles of deep water from the Swedish, it belongs geographically, as also historically, to Finland. Ethnographically, however, its inhabitants are Swedish, and the Ålanders, some 27,000 strong, unquestionably desired to belong to Sweden.

The question concerned Europe as a whole, for

a Great Power which mastered Åland would go far towards mastering the Baltic. Hence, after the Crimean War, the islands had been demilitarised, and hence, during the World War, the Allies allowed them to be refortified by Russia. In 1918 they were seized successively by the Swedes and Germans, and in 1919 Finland offended Sweden by treating them as her own. As a Finno-Swedish war threatened, the League of Nations, in 1920, took up the question, rejecting the Finnish contention that it was a domestic concern of Finland. Next year, however, after a commission had visited Åland, the islands were assigned to Finland, on condition of an autonomy which the League guaranteed. This was followed by a wide multiple treaty, signed by Britain, France and Italy, as well as by Sweden, Finland, Poland, Estonia and Latvia, renewing demilitarisation. Finland, apparently secure on both her flanks, then resisted the efforts of the south-eastern Baltic states to draw her into an alliance.

Even while Germany remained powerless to check Russia, Finland could now look forward to good relations with her neighbours, and to the security which a loyal member of the League might claim. Her Communists had become a separate party, in a minority, as compared with the non-revolutionaries, of less than one to eight. The burden of armaments,

therefore, need not be excessive. None the less, a formidable list of problems remained unsolved.

The first dispute, and superficially the fiercest, that centring on language, was one which no other Baltic people shared. If nationality signifies not merely legal citizenship but full identification with a State for many generations, then the Finns were a united nation. Their Swedish element was Finn, as the Bretons and Alsatians are French, or as the Highlanders are British. There was in Finland no racial distinction or proprietary claim like that which nourished enmity between the Lett or the Estonian and the "Baltic Barons." But the language cleavage coincided with a cleavage in culture and in class feeling which preserved the memory of the time when the Swedes had been the superior race. It was the more difficult of solution because neither language possessed any wide currency outside Finland and Sweden. In 1922 the rights of the individual were interpreted as securing for ten years to the Ålanders education and government in Swedish, to three other districts, both in Finnish and Swedish, while four were reserved for Finnish only. Since the criterion of district bilingualism was the existence of a linguistic minority of 10 per cent., while 10 per cent. now approached the average of Swedish-speaking Finns throughout the country, it was obvious that widespread hardship to the

Swedish speakers might result, especially in secondary education. This has, however, been mitigated by the assignment of a double grant to the Swedish secondary schools.

The structure of education was of vast importance to a people which, though poor and scattered, ranked among the most literate in Europe. For more than two centuries the Lutheran Church had made literacy compulsory for Finns who sought to be confirmed or married. The University of Helsingfors (Helsinki) numbered some three thousand students, male and female—a number doubled in the next twenty years. Yet in Finland, as in the states of the south-eastern Baltic, it was the land question that ranked supreme. Although in the later nineteenth century the vast estates, especially in the regions formerly Russian, had been much split up, there were still some 72,000 cottagers who tilled small holdings and paid rent in labour or in kind. Of more than 200,000 farm labourers, moreover, fully three-fifths were landless. North of the Gulf of Finland, no less than south, a free peasantry was necessary to guard the State against Bolshevism.

To swell the ranks of loyal yeomen, Finland, after the civil war of 1918, fixed the value of the small holdings at that current in 1914, and lent the tenants money to buy them. In 1922, when the Communists held more than one-eighth of the seats in the Diet,

the Agrarian premier, Kallio, brought in a bill to facilitate land purchase for the creation of small holdings. Graduated expropriation lay in the background but was never used. The challenge of the Kallio law was taken up by the Communists, supported as they were from Russia. Kallio, however, did not shrink from arresting both the Deputies and the leaders outside the Diet, and the country endorsed his action. The State lent money and a gradual revolution began.

The results of the agrarian changes, political, social and economic alike, have been brilliant. Communism immediately lost one-third of its voting strength. In twelve years, more than two million fresh acres were brought into cultivation, and the standard of productivity also rose. About 150,000 new landowners were created, so that the Finns may boast that one family in every three owns land. In some countries, indeed, the substitution of small holdings for great estates means that in place of large-scale production based on science, high-grade machinery and stock, and intelligent marketing and banking, the peasant must depend upon his own efforts, handicapped by primitive tools and a traditional rotation. These dangers the Finns have averted by a combination of study, co-operation both for production and consumption, and co-operative credit banking.

The history of certain less fortunate experiments proves at least that the Finns can both frame bold ideas and abandon them when they prove injurious in practice. Thus, in the later nineteenth century, when the temperance movement gained much support in Protestant Europe and America, Finland contemplated Prohibition, and in 1919 this became for a time the law. As in America, however, the results belied the hopes of its supporters. Drunkenness palpably increased, and no amount of customs and police activity could keep alcohol from those who wished to consume it. Year after year, however, the Prohibitionists refused to admit that what they deemed immoral should not necessarily remain illegal. In 1930, moreover, the challenge of an ostentatious Communist meeting at Lapua occasioned the formation of a quasi-Fascist party of pious farmers who demanded that all Communist institutions should be destroyed. The Premier, Svinhufvud, was sympathetic, but the Social Democrats took their stand against the proposed Lapuan legislation, and the country seemed to be on the verge of civil war. Over-production in the timber industry had led to a serious economic crisis, and the world shocks of 1929 intensified the general dislocation and discontent. Russia was notoriously dumping timber produced by labour camps in which the political prisoners of the Soviet worked as slaves.

Their historic enemy thereby added an attack upon the livelihood of the Finns to its attack upon their religion and their safety.

The general election of October 1930 proved, though by the narrowest possible majority, a triumph for the Lapuan or anti-Communist way of thinking. By just the necessary two-thirds, the Diet outlawed Communism. Two months later, in January 1931, a majority of two votes in three hundred made Svinhufvud President as against the Progressive Ståhlberg. A tense political situation, in which Fascist violence was often practised by the Lapuans, coincided with a strained economic situation, in which unemployment increased, while Finland followed Britain in the flight from gold. This meant that her sterling balances would buy less goods from countries that kept the gold standard, and that scarcity and uncertainty prevailed at a time when many Finns had lost their incomes.

In 1932 the stability of Finland was further tested by a rising of ultra-Fascists against the leniency of the administration towards Communism. The result was a signal triumph for moderation and common sense. The rising subsided without violence or heavy punishment, while Prohibition had been swept away by a popular majority of 5 : 2. At the same time unemployment, checked by subsidies and public works with the least possible

diminution of freedom, yielded somewhat to the general betterment of trade.

The advent of Hitler in 1933 thus synchronised with some recovery of prosperity in Finland, and with an attempt by Finland and Britain to develop their mutual trade at Germany's expense. If Finland were to keep the British market for her timber, she must henceforward accept British products, in place of using free exchange derived from Britain to pay for German goods. A German trade offensive failed. Whereas in 1928 German sales to Finland were thrice as valuable as British, in 1937 they were positively less. Meanwhile Finland's sales to Britain had risen by a full quarter, and were almost three-and-a-half times those to Germany. The changed situation postulated Finland's freedom to buy and sell as she pleased and to navigate the Baltic without restriction.

The recovery of Finland from the world crisis, which may be considered as complete by 1936, was accompanied by important if gradual changes in her outlook and position. In Russia nothing occurred which could remove the old antipathy. No western neighbour of the Soviet Union is under any illusion with regard to the conditions which prevail beyond the frontier, and with none is easy intercourse allowed. But the Union seemed to have good reason for its loudly advertised policy of

peace. With Germany Finland had friction regarding trade, she also complained of Nazi interference in Finnish politics, and disliked that German domination over the Baltic which the Anglo-German naval agreement tacitly conceded in 1935. Hence it was natural that, as Finland rose in the scale of nations, she should look more intensely and widely to the west. Her connexion with Britain and the United States, however, was rather one of trade and culture than of politics. Politically, she must rely upon the League of Nations, upon the support of Baltic Powers other than Germany or the Soviet Union, and upon herself. Her greatest safeguard, however, seemed to lie in the outspoken antagonism between Nazi principles and Communism.

One by one, however, the buttresses of Finland's system crumbled. The League, humiliated by its failure to protect Abyssinia, seemed to promise little more than perhaps to favour the Soviet against potential German aggression. Poland in 1934 made with Germany a pact of non-aggression and declined responsibility for the peace of eastern Europe. This made it vain for Finland to connect herself for safety with the south-eastern Baltic states. She preferred, and succeeded in developing, a connexion with the Scandinavian states, and the union of the so-called Oslo Powers extended to secondary non-

Baltic countries, Holland and Belgium chief among them. None, however, became a military ally of Finland, and she, like others, merely expressed her desire to remain neutral in any future war, and to co-operate with her neighbours in time of peace.

Many factors combined, however, to make the military strength of Finland greater than might be expected in a peaceful republic of less than four million souls. Physically, her people rank high, comprising as they do a sturdy agricultural majority, an urban minority dwelling in towns of moderate size and new construction, and a Government bent on promoting hygiene. The unforgotten stresses of Finnish history, both tsarist and independent, warned them against disarmament, while even the growth of Social Democracy favoured the imposition upon every citizen of the burden of national defence. The mounting revenue, moreover, enabled good equipment to be supplied without straining the national resources. Although, therefore, the peace effective amounted to no more than some 25,000 men, where Poland reckoned ten times that number and the Soviet Union 1,600,000, the reserves and auxiliaries were excellent and relatively strong. The civic guard numbered 100,000, while the women folk were organised into nation-wide supporting units.

Years of peaceful work and widespread prosperity, moreover, strengthened the nation by largely

obliterating its old divisions. Militant Swedes or Fascists or even Communists almost disappeared from Finland. When the year 1939 began, Finland seemed to be a State sufficiently large and learned to escape the epithet "provincial," yet, like the Scandinavian States, not large enough to lose a certain family feeling. Then in a moment the condition of her safety was destroyed. On the pretext of self-defence, the Soviet set out to destroy the independence of her western neighbours, while Germany, by closing the Baltic, isolated them from the west.

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had no choice but to accept the Soviet demands. Finland went far towards following their example. The cession of five islands was promised, though the proffered territorial compensation further north might be accounted worthless. Rather than sacrifice her independence by such a sacrifice as that of Hankö, however, she protracted the negotiations beyond the patience of the Soviet leaders. The fiction of a Finnish armed attack was staged, the legend of a British menace promulgated, and what was thought to be an irresistible invasion launched. It resulted in a series of bloody Finnish victories. Across the isthmus which lay between Leningrad and Viipuri (Viborg), the Finnish "Mannerheim Line" remained unbroken until, late in February, the expected snowstorms brought relief. Meanwhile,

although the Soviet forces seized Petsamo, more dangerous attacks on central and southern Finland were crushed by the superior skill and mobility of the Finns, aided by the lakes and forests which forced the invaders to advance in column and which checked supplies.

At the same time the civilised world was deeply moved by the spectacle of a peace-loving race attacked on a flimsy pretext and recklessly bombarded from the air. Hospitals seemed to be selected for attack and eighteen bombs were aimed at a boy in the open country. The Finnish campaign, by unexpectedly taxing Russian resources, threatened at once to starve Germany of supplies and to restore her ascendancy over Russia. It showed how much help could be given by a belligerent without abandoning neutrality, and how determined were neutrals throughout the world to avoid the risk of war. As all the world knows, the refusal of the Scandinavian Powers either to stand by Finland or to grant transit to the expeditionary force of the Allies brought about the capitulation of the Finns. From April 1940 a Finland reduced in area, though—thanks to the flight of the Finns from Soviet rule—retaining her population, has accepted servitudes like those of the "Baltic States" which secure Russian supremacy over the eastern Baltic shores.

CHAPTER IV

POLAND

FROM Finland, in which, of all the lost Swedish dominions, the greatest Swedish influence survives, it might seem natural to turn next to Sweden. Sweden, indeed, is still closely joined, by history and by geography alike, with Finland and, though less closely, with Estonia and Latvia. Sweden, however, possessing an outlet to the North Sea both through her own Gothenburg (Göteborg) and through the ports of her neighbours, depends upon the Baltic less than do Finland and the "Baltic States," and less than the more distant and almost landlocked Poland. Poland, endowed by the Peace Conference of 1919 with a brief coastline and with maritime rights over the Free State of Danzig, is, and must always be, the focus of so many Baltic problems as next to claim attention.

Hitherto we have considered four States which are beyond question small, which have no ambition to be otherwise, and which in a high degree depend upon the Baltic. Poland, on the other hand, ranks

as a considerable State, openly aspiring to regain her earlier eminence. In acreage, indeed, she barely surpasses Finland, but her population of some 35,000,000 is almost four times as great as that of Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania combined, while in revenue she considerably exceeds their aggregate and in armed forces leaves their total far behind.

Few States, however, have been faced with so many stubborn and complex problems as the Poland to which the Great War gave rebirth. Provinces devastated by the Russians or systematically stripped of grain and timber by the Germans, man-power deported or wasted in fratricidal war, countryside and inhabitants alike ruled for four generations by three sets of aliens—such antecedents demanded in 1918 a tremendous national effort of reconstruction. For several years, moreover, it remained uncertain what the national frontiers would be, and whether or no Poland could secure a reasonable access to the Baltic. When 1919 had given her rights over Danzig, 1920 proved them worthless in time of need. Even when the area of the new State was duly defined, its racial content hindered national union. Perhaps one-third of her citizens were Ukrainians or Jews, Germans or Russians. But few of these could feel themselves other than foreigners, and many looked outside Poland for

inspiration. Millions of Jews wore a non-Polish dress and used a non-Polish language. After twenty years of the new Poland, a member of her Parliament could cry to his Jewish colleagues, "You are ten per cent. of the nation and you have forty per cent. of its wealth," while many Ukrainians still boycotted the elections.

During the fulfilment of the long task of welding German, Russian and Austrian Poland into one Polish people, other and even greater problems pressed for solution. Chief among these was the problem of the land. Some seven-tenths of the people were agriculturists, and the soil was not spacious or rich enough to provide all with reasonable subsistence.

As time went on, a high birth-rate and new restrictions on admission to foreign lands made their livelihood still harder to obtain. Diversion of the surplus millions to industry was hampered by lack of trained employees and of capital. The State stepped in, but with varying success. Many of its enterprises failed: others continued with little profit or at a loss. The progress of education, indeed, promised a better future, and a few brilliant constructive triumphs refuted the German slander that Poles can do nothing but destroy. Although the fact that Poland never possessed more than some 50,000 civilian motor vehicles illuminates the state

of transport, steady progress was made with roads and waterways, while the railway system became excellent. The creation of a first-rate port at Gdynia may rank as the foremost of Poland's recent triumphs. In agriculture also organisation was much advanced, and Polish products gained a growing reputation both in Britain and in the United States. None the less, over wide areas the peasants' lot remained a hard one. Mere subsistence farming, each family, with infinite toil, growing small crops of everything that it needed, could not enrich the nation.

To achieve greater social justice, and thereby to guard the State against Bolshevism, Poland revised the distribution of estates. In 1919 her Constituent Assembly had voted for Agrarian Reform, and next year, when she was at death-grips with the Bolshevik armies, a bill for State expropriation of the large landowners was voted. In 1925 this was adapted to the parallel task of extinguishing dwarf holdings, the normal limit of ownership being reduced to some 450 acres, while the peasants' scattered strips were to give place to more solid plots. Poland's acreage, however, is too small to provide for all her peasant sons.

Second only to the land question was that of the central government. Its solution, like much else in reborn Poland, was due in part to the traditions and

characteristics of the nation and in part to the peculiar genius of Pilsudski. In the days of their former greatness the Poles had been dominated by their gentry, to whom individual liberty was the very breath of life. Before the later eighteenth century, when historic Poland was partitioned by three neighbouring Great Powers, she had been internationally enfeebled by the "gentry outlook" of her sons. The local magnates, and the squires who represented their fellow gentry in Parliament, refused to submerge their individual will in that of a majority as resolutely as they refused to grant real power to a king or to engage in trade. In the twentieth century, though the Poles had learned much from their long enslavement, this "gentry outlook" still survived. The broad democracy with which Pilsudski at once endowed the new State added a mass of peasant representatives to the more enlightened deputies, but where she needed large patriotic parties, Poland found merely innumerable cliques. At the best, many who in time of war preferred ruin to abandoning their country, in time of peace upheld their prejudices with equal zeal. At the worst, deputies untrained in government used their new power to serve their own interest or were guilty of calumny and faction. As in some degree in well-trained Finland, as in a greater degree in the untrained "Baltic States," so in Poland un-

qualified democracy proved ill-adapted to the swift creation of a stable and equitable State.

In such a case, where, on peril of disaster, much must be done on all sides without delay, nations do well to postpone their training in self-government, and to entrust wide powers to a small body or to a single man. The price must be that their salvation, if effected, will bear the stamp of those by whom it was achieved. Peter and Frederick, whom history calls "Great," were State founders, not colourless channels for the creative forces of their peoples. Thus it was of high import to Poland that in the chaos of November 1918, and on the brink of disaster in July 1920, she turned for leadership to Joseph Pilsudski. He thus became virtual dictator during the years when her boundaries were in dispute, as again between 1926 and 1935, and his personal merits and defects left a deep impress upon her history.

Pilsudski, a Lithuanian in the same sense as Mannerheim is a Swede, was a man of great charm, versatile talent and unsurpassed force and determination. A roving life, with long periods of gaol and exile, taught him to look within for inspiration, and to love Poland utterly, while conscious of the defects of the Poles. As a Russian Pole his inbred hatred was of Russia, as a son of Vilna he could not conceive of a Poland without that gracious city, as a

refugee in Austrian Poland he knew that the best that foreigners could do for his country was far inferior to what she might and must accomplish for herself. Completely fearless and completely disinterested, it was said of him that only the approach of danger made his pulse beat at a normal rate. Though proud to be a self-taught soldier, and rightly termed a man of iron, there was in him a certain Bismarckian dualism. Especially in later life, when ill-health and overwork had increased his solitude, this soul of courtesy and honour "could be a perfect brute." Though never bloodthirsty, he might be vindictive towards an opponent whom he regarded as a traitor, while his realism sometimes disdained the disguise which a Briton regards as indispensable to his consciousness of his own deeds or merits. A prisoner before taking office, a recluse in the years of his greatest power, he became the almost legendary father of the reborn Polish State.

During the first year after the Armistice, it fell to Pilsudski to organise a new Poland on the territories abandoned through the collapse of Austria and Russia and reluctantly relinquished for the moment by the Germans. Warfare continued on several sides, notably for Lwow (Lemberg) and Ukrainian Galicia. Meanwhile at Paris the great patriot Paderewski joined Pilsudski's chief opponent Dmowski in upholding Polish claims, which, as at

first formulated, were tinged by a feeling that the pre-Partition territories ought in the main to be restored. When the representatives of many nations met for the Peace Conference of 1919, the Poles had the reputation of being charming but unpractical, able propagandists but unfit to rule themselves or others, and persecutors of the Jews.

The Conference was soon faced with the unenviable task of reorganising eastern Europe, a region which few of its leading members knew or understood. None could predict with confidence the future of the Russian State. All that was clear in 1919 was that Bolshevism, instead of proving a mere temporary Muscovite aberration, threatened all central Europe. That fact was but the chief of many which dictated urgent haste in making peace with Germany. This was impossible unless an eastern frontier for Germany was drawn, and therefore the Powers must hurry on the re-establishment of Poland. They were agreed only that an independent national Polish State must be set up and that it must have access to the sea.

The final decision substantially rested with three men, who spoke respectively for Britain, France and the United States. President Wilson had the strength which came from a disinterested situation and from the fact that the principles to be applied were his. M. Clemenceau, outstanding in personality and in-

tellect, surpassed his colleagues in grasp of the issues at stake and in freedom from illusions. He was convinced that whatever arrangements might be made, the Germans would not become peaceful Europeans, and that a strong Poland would help to keep them in check. Wilson and Clemenceau, therefore, for different reasons, accepted the unanimous recommendation of an expert committee that Danzig and a railway south of it, as well as Posnania and Upper Silesia, should be assigned to Poland.

This view, however, was strenuously contested by Mr. Lloyd George, with the British Imperial delegates at his back. If too much were demanded of Germany, he contended, she would refuse to sign the treaty. Disarmament, occupation, Alsace-Lorraine, Posnania, a vast indemnity—were not these sacrifices enough, without transferring Germans to a race which had never shown capacity to rule? “As well give a clock to a monkey as Silesia to the Poles,” expressed a widely held conviction. However much he might be influenced by Jewish experts, by jealousy of France, by fear of fresh adventure and by dislike of certain Poles, the British Premier was voicing a belief that was widespread in the Empire and by no means new. “An absolutely independent Poland,” declared Lord Salisbury after the failure of the rising of 1863, “is a mere chimaera.” A keen

contemporary observer¹ found the Poles highly gifted and charming but lacking in that feeling for the essential and the unessential which qualified the Finns for politics. Many held in 1919 that the bigger Poland became the weaker she would be.

Thanks to Britain, therefore, the proposal to assign to Poland Danzig and the Warsaw railway was rejected, and a narrow racial Polish "Corridor" to the Baltic was flanked by the Danzig Free State. It was tacitly left to the League of Nations to make these frail frontiers secure, and, if need be, to devise means for their revision.

The statesmen of 1919 were thus dealing with two closely related and intractable problems of the Baltic—the political allegiance of Danzig and the nature of the link between Germany and her province of East Prussia. The survivors of 1939 need no reminder that Colonel Beck's declaration that Poland could not accept exclusion from the sea was occasioned by the Danzig question and itself occasioned the Fourth Partition.

Geographically, Danzig is to the Vistula what Rotterdam is to the Rhine—a city with a spacious inland harbour controlling the chief outlet of a great arterial river. As a waterway, indeed, the shallow Vistula, long neglected by the Russian overlords of Poland, is as far from rivalling the

¹ Ralph Butler: *The New Eastern Europe* (1919), *passim*.

Rhine as its basin lags behind the Rhenish in respect of wealth and population. It none the less remains the channel into which most of the Polish rivers flow, on which the two Polish capitals and many other cities stand, and with which no other Polish river can compare. Danzig without the Vistula would be insignificant, and the Vistula stands for Polish trade. Historically, Danzig, as its name reveals, is a Slavonic settlement, and on its western side the "Corridor" remains Slavonic. Beyond the "Corridor," however, until the Elbe is reached, the old Slavonic lands have long been germanised, while under Bismarck's guidance the new German Empire made systematic and costly efforts to germanise the Polish provinces which she had seized. Danzig, indeed, was in modern times too German to need such intervention. Down to the fall of Napoleon, it may be said, she had been a cosmopolitan and wealthy city, dominated by patricians who were mainly of German descent, but whose chief desire was virtual independence. Poland for centuries furnished them with trade, gave them her citizenship and respected their liberties and their religion. They in return resented alike the prospect of her displacement as their overlord by Russia or by Prussia. With some slight aid from Britain, they escaped annexation though not injury by Frederick the Great, only in 1793 to fall to his successor.

During the four generations (1795-1918) in which Poland remained partitioned while Germany grew rich and powerful, Danzig, though much neglected,¹ became as German as Königsberg or as Breslau. The statesmen of 1919 seemed to be faced with a painful choice between assigning to Poland a city mainly peopled by loyal Germans, or subjecting to Germany all the trade of Poland with the west, whether by land or sea, as well as Polish independence. In an apt contemporary simile, the lower Vistula was Poland's windpipe.

The question was gravely complicated by the fact that the narrow Polish "Corridor" would sever East Prussia from the rest of Germany. An earlier Polish plan² had advocated making the German-speaking core of this province a small republic, destined in time to unite with Poland of its own accord. This plan, however, proposed to compensate Germany with the German portion of the Austrian Empire, a concession which the Allies declined to make. In the conflict between contending principles, that of Poland's national right of access to the sea would have prevailed, but for the adverse attitude of Britain. She, indeed, could not deny that the bulk of the traffic between East Prussia and the rest of Germany was seaborne, and that

¹ Cp. S. Askenazy: *Danzig and Poland* (1921), c. vi.

² R. Dmowski: *Polityka Polska* (1925), 263-265.

undiminished railway facilities for crossing the "Corridor" could be guaranteed, while a land-locked Poland would be menaced by the Germans both in peace and war. The German Empire was therefore severed, but its sacrifice and Poland's gain were reduced by making Danzig and its district a Free State of some 400,000 people. The customs, defence and diplomacy of Danzig were to be controlled by Poland, while the League of Nations would appoint a High Commissioner and decide disputes. Connexion between Danzig and Warsaw involved the use of a Free State railway.

While the Germans more deeply resented the assignment to Poland of a portion of industrial Silesia, they never sincerely accepted the Polish rights over Danzig, or indeed any surrender of their old Partition gains. Next year, when the Russians marched on Warsaw, Danzig declined to transmit munitions, and although much enriched by expanding Polish trade, the Free State was constantly at loggerheads with Poland. So long as Germany was disarmed there was less to fear, for in 1920 Poland triumphantly repulsed the Bolsheviks and her defensive strength, both military and economic, grew year by year. Common prudence, however, forced her to seek an alternative port to Danzig, and during the early 'twenties a town and harbour in the same bay, within ten miles beyond the mouth

of the Vistula, were designed. This Gdynia, from its first conception to its magnificent embodiment in fact, formed a standing affront both to Danzig and to the Germans, with whom Polish futility had long been an article of faith.

Even among Germans, however, the *a priori* conviction that Poland had no right to exist, could not entirely resist the fact that she continued to exist and flourish. In 1926 she gained a semi-permanent place in the Council of the League of Nations; in 1932 she concluded a non-aggression pact with Russia. France, though rejected as a patron, remained her friend; Rumania had been her ally since 1921; with Hungary her ancient friendship was deep and warm. In the conscience of Britain and many another nation, her continued work for civilisation at home and abroad made her more and more a traditional factor in the established order. In 1933, therefore, when Hitler gained power and fulminated against Russia, Pilsudski held that the time had come to end the unceasing friction with her western neighbour. He first defied the Nazi power by reinforcing the guard of the Polish munition dump near Danzig. Hitler accepted this and, within a year, Poland added to her previous treaties a ten years' non-aggression pact with Germany. In September, 1938, Hitler spoke in the warmest terms of the good neighbourly relations thus established.

In the interval, however, the position of Poland had suffered many changes. The rearmament of Germany by land and sea had revived the striking power of a nation which could never sincerely tolerate Polish independence and which could now once more cut off the Poles from western succour. Nazi principles had permeated Danzig as well as many of the German settlements in Poland. The entry of the Soviet Union into the League, a body which was defied with impunity by Italy, had made it an object of Polish distrust. On the other hand, by spending half her national income on the army, Poland had built up a large and loyal force, inspired with the tradition of Pilsudski and popular throughout the land. Her high birthrate promised a future man-power which even Germany might envy, coming as it largely did from that peasant class whose predominance both gives a nation tough defenders and makes it hard to starve out or overthrow. This force, with a relatively small air arm and a nascent navy, was supported by an economy which had survived the currency depreciation of the early 'twenties and the terrible shock of the world economic crisis. Good judges traversing Poland from abroad gained a strong impression of her stability.¹ The statistical survey of 1939² showed

¹ E.g. R. L. Buell: *Poland, Key to Europe* (1939).

² *Maly Rocznik Statystyczny* (Rok X).

that the Post Office Savings Bank had 3,406,000 depositors' accounts, while the similar Communal establishments had 1,766,000. The sums deposited, indeed, amounted to less than one-twelfth of the corresponding items in this country, which are only one-half of the German, but they were more than two-thirds of the Belgian. At the same time the number of Polish unemployed, 456,000, equalled the German and was one-fourth of that of England. A nation of 35,000,000, among which only some 25,000 have more than £800 per annum, while the average income is little more than one-fifth of that in Britain, must depend for capital and for industrial initiative upon the State. What Polish work accomplishes may none the less be termed amazing. More than one-seventh of the world's potatoes come from her soil. In animal products and in timber she ranks high. Her harvest of flax is surpassed only by that of Russia, and of rye, only by the Russian and the German. In the decade ending with 1938 her seaborne trade was more than double that of 1928.

Having regard to the high natural capacity of the Poles, who in this respect are truly the French of eastern Europe, the best criteria of progress, however, may well be those which relate not to things but to mankind. Between 1920 and 1937, it is calculated, the world population rose from some 1789 to

2134 millions, that of Europe from 450 to 537, and that of Great Britain from nearly 42·8 to just over 46·2. Poland meanwhile advanced from nearly 26·7 to some 34·4, thus adding to her human reservoir at double the normal Continental rate. Within those seventeen years the Germans had increased from some 59 millions to some 64, a rate which promised that ere long her men in the battle-winning early twenties would not immensely outnumber their contemporaries among the Poles. Meanwhile the burden of illiteracy bequeathed by Russia to the greater part of Poland was being rapidly reduced. In 1921, almost one-third of the population could neither read nor write. A decade reduced the proportion almost to one-fifth. Among children between ten and fourteen years of age only one in fifteen remained untaught, the vast majority in remote country districts. Some of the eastern marsh-dwellers, it is said, lived for years after 1914 in ignorance of the outbreak of the Great War.

Housing statistics tell the same tale of a nation, poor indeed, but determined to make the best of life. In three years (1935-37) in the Polish towns more than 44,000 dwellings were begun, designed for the most part to house more than one family and in nearly five hundred cases more than twenty. The "industrial triangle" project for a new and

safer manufacturing centre near the confluence of the Vistula and the San, and the drastic regulations for the improvement of private properties, proved that the national zeal for improvement remained unabated on the eve of the German invasion. It is notable that whereas in 1935 less than 46 per cent. of the parliamentary electors voted, in 1938 more than 67 per cent. of the 17,626,000 voters went to the poll. Such facts may rank with the better-known valour and devotion of the Poles and with their glories in literature, learning and the arts, to prove that their continued independence is a vital interest of mankind. Without a sea-board on the Baltic, Poland cannot be.

CHAPTER V

SCANDINAVIA AND THE BALTIC

THE three Scandinavian States, Denmark, Norway and Sweden, have a long and tangled history in which the Baltic has played a great and sometimes a dominant part. It was the Sound Dues that for centuries enriched Denmark, its doorkeeper, and the Baltic gave first to the Danes and afterwards to the Swedes their opportunity of empire. In the long struggle between these two nations, Norway was at first the appanage of one and then the junior partner of the other, growing meanwhile in strength and in the ambition to resume her ancient independence. Since 1905, when this ambition was realised without bloodshed, a happier era has set in. All three Powers, with royal families close akin, with moderate Social Democrats their largest party, and with common aspirations for peace and civilisation, have formed a clique or council, to which Finland and a few other peace-loving secondary States have access. The closest connexion, however, is still that between those three Scandinavian crowns,

which in the fifteenth century were actually united by a single ruler, the King of Denmark.

Since Sweden is predominantly a Baltic Power, while Denmark must always have strong Baltic interests, we must enquire how strong the bonds which unite this trio may be, and what is the weight of its several members. The latter question could be more readily answered if all or nearly all the Scandinavians remained in their fatherland. Sweden has about 170,000 square miles of territory and more than 6,000,000 people ; Denmark, a mere 16,500 miles, but more than half the Swedish population ; while Norway has 125,000 miles with less than 3,000,000 inhabitants.

There are thus in all some 12,500,000 Scandinavians in Europe, with a territory half as large again as Spain, but one of which the northern half is thinly peopled. Their strength of mind and body and the high level of their civilisation makes them count for more in Europe than the forty-fourth part that they attain by numbers. Their wealth is roughly indicated by aggregate annual budgets of some £100,000,000. Abjuring militarism, they maintain small standing armies amounting, in time of peace, to less than 60,000 men. Sweden and Norway, however, have compulsory military service and several hundred thousand potential soldiers. Their navies, too, are hardly proportionate to their considerable

mercantile fleets. These last comprise in all some 7,000,000 tons, of which more than one-half is Norwegian.

To estimate the power of nations, however, it is necessary to reckon with the contribution that their emigrants might or would furnish in time of need. All three sections of Scandinavians, headed by the Swedes, have kinsmen by the thousand in the New World. Many, indeed, have been absorbed, but many retain the speech and outlook of their motherland. Thanks to them, their homelands make a more considerable figure in the world, and Scandinavians know that in danger they may expect some moral and material support and if need be an asylum.

What such support would amount to, is, however, as difficult to estimate exactly as is the value of fraternal or pan-Scandinavian feeling. The three nations have laid aside their ancient bitter feuds. They have the advantage of being mutually intelligible in both their written and their spoken languages. They are all predominantly Lutheran, and the prevailing standard of education is extremely high. Although in Denmark and Sweden there are more rich men than in Norway, throughout Scandinavia modest comfort on the whole prevails, and grinding poverty and squalor are seldom found. The failure of pan-Scandinavian sentiment to save Denmark from the Germans in 1864 forms no con-

clusive argument against spontaneous collaboration eighty years later, if Scandinavian civilisation were endangered. To-day, moreover, the three kindred and like-minded nations are not commercial rivals. While Sweden is enriched by exports of high-grade iron ore and wood products, Norway abounds in fish and Denmark in bacon, eggs and butter. Their trade is chiefly with neighbouring nations, Britain absorbing vast quantities of foodstuffs and wood products, and Germany of foodstuffs and iron ore. Among educated populations socialistically inclined and of modest means, the co-operative movement finds a fertile soil, and the co-operative agriculture of Denmark is unsurpassed.

Now that they enjoy well-established peace among themselves, and no less well-established renunciation of all aggression, their outstanding political question is that of self-defence. How can they protect their frontiers and their neutrality?

For Denmark, this may be pronounced impossible. If a free agent, she can have no enemy save Germany, and the enemy of Germany is likely to find many friends. Alike by land and sea and air, however, Denmark lies so open to German attack that no combination of her own strength with that of others can promise to save her from destruction. A country half the size of Scotland with a people less numerous than the Finns and no natural defences

cannot withstand a neighbour with many million soldiers and no scruples about their use. This fact, reinforced by memories of 1864, has of late years impelled her to approach complete disarmament, although even a small neutral, if well armed, may acquire considerable influence in the later stages of a widespread war.

Norway, on the other hand, so long as Sweden, Finland and Denmark are unsubdued, lies remote from attack except by air or sea. Her maritime position and the close connexion of her trade with Britain may well warrant her in assuming that Britain will defend her if wantonly attacked. As a neutral she can render services to Britain comparable with those of the Netherlands to Germany, while to a blockaded belligerent the sea-route through her territorial waters must be priceless. Her importance to the Baltic consists partly in this indirect control of its northern gate as well as of land routes to its northern shores, and partly in her influence upon the security and strength of Sweden.

Sweden, with a stalwart people more numerous than the Danes and Norwegians combined, with a less scanty navy and air force and an unbroken military tradition, might well seem destined to play a greater part in politics. Under her Gustavuses and Charleses her military fame was unsurpassed, and she is one of the few European peoples who can

boast of immemorial freedom. In resisting Russia the Finns may well have been inspired by their centuries of Swedish liberty. A nation perhaps excelling all others in the standard of her craftsmanship, she possesses both the material for arms and the power of manufacture. Some military failures in the eighteenth century and in 1809, followed by a century and a quarter of unbroken peace, cannot be said to have made Sweden contemptible.

All through the nineteenth century, however, she lived in fear of Russia. Though checked by the Crimean War, Russia was the power that had taken Finland from her and that threatened to move next against the Arctic coasts of her peninsula. The Russian failure against Japan (1904-1905) caused keen delight at Stockholm, and in the Great War an Activist party longed to fight against Russia and her allies. Close bonds of trade, travel, and education, especially military education, bound influential classes in Sweden to Germany, in some degree the Holy Land of a Lutheran country. It is said that the terrible spectacle of invalid Russian prisoners transported through Sweden for repatriation helped to keep her neutral. It is certain that the Swedish Socialists discouraged intervention against the Allies, and that the blockade involved Sweden in hardships which might well disincline her, then or later, to follow a policy of adventure.

The fall of the Tsardom, of course, removed any immediate danger from Russia. The ultimate consent of the Bolsheviks to the establishment on their western frontier of a chain of "self-determined" States, Finland among them, seemed to make Sweden secure. As Soviet Russia remained in being, however, and created an enormous army, Swedish fears revived, and were nourished by the progress of aviation and by Soviet activity within the Arctic circle. Hitler's outspoken denunciation of the Russians, like their loud lip-service to the cause of peace, told in the opposite direction, while no power had surpassed Sweden in championing the League of Nations. Protected by the League, intimate with the neighbouring secondary States, friendly with Germany, with the Western Allies, with Poland and with the United States, the Swedes might well think themselves safe. They had weathered the shattering economic crisis and were becoming prosperous as never before.

This favoured position was destroyed by the world events which the Abyssinian adventure set in motion. Abyssinia lamed the League, the resultant Axis unleashed Hitler, and the existence of all secondary States became a question of geography and of good fortune. So long as Germany, the mistress of the Baltic, remained anti-Russian, Sweden might count herself secure, for Germany

was traditionally her friend, and against the Germans the Western Powers would surely give protection. In August 1939, however, the German-Soviet agreement shattered the whole foundation of the Swedish system. Soon Baltic trade lost its freedom, North Sea trade became dangerous, the "Baltic States" were subjugated by Russia, and Finland, unaided, could hardly hope to escape their fate. Would Soviet aggression stop at Finland?

The Swedish people rallied to the Finnish cause, which undeniably was also their own. The Government had full authority from the League of Nations to execute its decree outlawing the Soviet Union. Germany, however, had in the field a vast and unbroken air force, a navy far superior to the Swedish, and a well-found army reputed more than four million strong. Sweden, as from Rumania to Holland all the menaced States, shrank from the risk of being drawn into the major war. When in mid-February 1940 the hard-pressed Finns appealed to her for help, the Government rejected their appeal, and the aged King declared that he could not face the risk of involving Sweden in the struggle between the Great Powers.

Without Scandinavian assent, the Allies could not reinforce the Finns, and Russia triumphed. In the next month, the Germans overran Denmark and a great part of Norway while accepting the neutrality

of Sweden on the eve of their onslaught against the Low Countries. This acceptance was generally ascribed to their need and hope of obtaining by way of the Baltic the precious iron ore of northern Sweden and to the need of a buffer-state by the German and the Russian empires. In so far as Hitler's Scandinavian adventure was designed to guard his armies invading France against an onslaught through Scandinavia its purpose had been fulfilled when he gained Trondheim. Sweden, on the other hand, could not but feel that her own strength was insufficient to extricate herself from the position in which she had been placed by the first eight months of war. The two Baltic Great Powers had overwhelmed every other Baltic State, and, small as was the probability that her affluent population would be suffered long to remain undisturbed, she preferred it to intervention. The respite gained by her neutrality at least enabled her to arm, while circumstances made her one of the few Powers from which mediation might ultimately come.

By midsummer 1940, none the less, her isolation from the western world was almost complete. No Swedish ship outside Scandinavian waters entered or left a Swedish harbour. While utterly determined to defend her neutrality, Sweden could only seek to replace her vanished trade by increased exchanges with Germany and Russia.

CHAPTER VI

RUSSIA AND THE BALTIC

FEW will doubt that the second place among the local factors in modern Baltic history is held by the Great Power which is still spoken of as Russia. For two decades after the Great War, indeed, her Baltic frontier, remote and often ice-bound, was reduced to a strip some six score miles in length. In this the port of Leningrad, shielded by Cronstadt on its island but flanked by Viipuri (Viborg) in Finland and Narva in Estonia, recalls the classic achievement of Peter the Great in hacking an outlet through the Swedish barrier which safeguarded Europe by keeping the Russians from the Baltic. In 1725, when he died, he had made the coast from beyond Viborg to Riga Russian. The next two centuries gave the Tsars almost the whole of the eastern Baltic shore together with the Åland Islands, which dominate the Gulf of Bothnia and Stockholm. For more than a generation, between the fall of Napoleon and the Crimean War, Russia towered over Scandinavia and Prussia, while

the Western Powers were to learn in 1855 how hard it was to attack her in the Baltic.

When, therefore, on the morrow of the Great War, the Bolshevik lords of Russia, expelled from Finland and Estonia, from Lithuania, Latvia and Poland, frankly recognised that these peoples had a right to self-determination, they proclaimed a signal triumph of social justice over historical tradition. Power, expanding outwards until it meets a stronger than itself, here bowed to human right and accepted the preference of its weaker neighbours for self-rule. This noble principle was embodied in the new Soviet Union, where the majestic Russian Federated Socialist Republic, stretching from Leningrad to Vladivostok, owned the miserable republic of White Russia as its equal, constitutionally entitled to leave the Union at will.

Cynics, indeed, suspected that the Bolsheviks' abandonment of all claim to the Tsarist conquests, was not wholly prompted by a sense of right. For the time being they were obviously hard put to it to keep their grip on Russian racial territory. If the survival of Bolshevism required it, they were ready, as Lenin said, to retreat even to Kamschatka. Against the Whites and their allies they therefore appealed to principles more lofty than those of the Tsars whom they were struggling to succeed. They sincerely believed, moreover, in the validity and in

the future of their Marxist principles, for which, rather than to defend Russia, they had taken up arms. Marxism had already convulsed Germany and Hungary, as well as the ex-Russian border States. In time, and that no long time, Soviet Russia counted on bringing her neighbours by force of conviction into her own fold.

A few years proved, however, that the Marxist principles were less potent than had been supposed. It was suspected that even within the Soviet Union they were invoked rather to keep the Bolsheviks in power than to evangelise humanity for its own good. Missionary work outside was regarded as designed to further the political interests of the Soviet—a nuisance to be bought off by treaty, though the Soviet could always evade fulfilment ascribing breaches to the Comintern. The border States, under no illusions, attempted a fourfold defence. Their own conduct was scrupulously correct. All maintained envoys at Moscow and received Soviet diplomats in return. They placed no impediments in the way of trade or transport, and avoided entangling anti-Soviet alliances. At the same time, for self-preservation, they repressed Communist agents and deprived their own professing Communists of legal status. They all became zealous members of the League of Nations, a body which in 1934 admitted the Soviet Union. And

they all established a national duty of armed service, proclaiming—what, indeed, the nature of the case made evident—that they thought only of self-defence.

Finland and the three “Baltic States,” however, remained small and weak countries which in the recent past both Russia and Germany had coveted or possessed. Poland, though stronger, lay still more completely exposed. As Nazi Germany gained strength, and asserted more and more loudly that might gave her right, the basis of the security of her weaker neighbours must, of necessity, contract. The experience of Abyssinia proved that the League could not protect them. The facts of geography and the reports of Bolshevist intrigues in France warned them against blindly trusting to the Western Powers. Their chief hope, therefore, seemed to lie in the moderation, however caused, of the Soviet Union, and in the antithesis between the Soviet and Germany, on which the policy of Hitler professedly was based.

All the world knows that in the late summer of 1939 both these hopes proved false. After negotiations parallel with those of the Soviet with France and Britain, Russians and Germans announced a pact of non-aggression and a permanent *entente* for peaceful collaboration. It appeared that the Western Powers had lost the Russian alliance by refusing to bargain away the independence of the smaller States.

The sequel swiftly followed. The Germans invaded Poland ; the Polish Government was forced to flee ; the Russians declared that the other party to the Polish-Soviet non-aggression pact had ceased to exist, and that to avert anarchy they would occupy half its country. Their invasion extinguished the Polish hopes of withstanding the Germans and, as in 1793, Russia and Prussia simply partitioned Poland.

Meanwhile the Soviet revealed a part at least of the price which Germany had paid for their complicity. It had already been made evident that if she still cherished hopes of enrichment from the Ukraine these could be realised only by a breach with her new friends or by their permission. In October, obviously with German approval, the Soviet proceeded to destroy the independence of three republics which, some twenty-two years earlier, Germany had regarded as her own. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania conceded rights of garrison which made them protectorates of Moscow.

Finland went far towards meeting similar demands but preferred the risk of immediate ruin to the certainty of leaving herself defenceless. Her heroism won the admiration of mankind and may prove to have influenced its fate. The spring of 1940, none the less, saw the small State forced by its losses to submit.

All this had proved that the Bolsheviks were inclined no longer to abjure on moral grounds the tsarist military position in the Baltic. They had seized the opportunity to sell to Germany at a high price that security in the rear which would enable her to defy the democratic Powers. Whither they would now steer Russia was, however, a momentous Baltic problem which can only be approached by scanning the origins of their power.

No revolution can break entirely with the past, and the Great Russian people still remained by far the greatest single constituent of the Soviet Union. That people had been distinguished by certain characteristics which were the outcome of many generations and which could hardly be eradicated at a blow. Servility and superstition, ignorance and lack of mechanical talent, conservatism, local collectivism and fatalism—such were supposed to be the attributes of those on whom an energetic and largely non-Russian minority had now imposed their rule. “The old Government took our corn and the new Government takes our corn: we hate all Governments,” may well be the authentic voice of the Russian peasantry. For a time at least, the Bolshevik Government was a tyranny of townsmen over the far more populous countryside, violating the strong instinct of the more energetic to become yeomen and of the great majority to remain in

their accustomed rut. Civil war, famine, general poverty, discontent and chaos—these characterised the Soviet Union in its earlier years. Peace was then indispensable.

As peace was kept while Government bent all its strength to create a new and subservient nation, the danger of a counter-revolution necessarily diminished. The exiles, Trotsky no less than the Whites, grew old or died, and in Russia a generation rose to manhood to whom Bolshevik rule seemed natural. The Stalin Government did its utmost both to capture and train the young, and—themselves largely ignorant of the outside world—to isolate their subjects from foreign influences. A huge closed world of two classes, the ruling party and the subservient mass, with agriculture, like industry and commerce, centrally controlled, with no object of worship save the Party or the State, defended by a gigantic army and enriched by scientific experiment on a colossal scale—such was to be the Soviet Union. In time, the Comintern, which it protected, would convert the outside world to the same way of thinking, and the Union would embrace mankind. Meanwhile the Communist empire must be developed with passionate haste, for in dominions sprinkled over with natural riches the standard of life was so low that every foreigner seemed a plutocrat.

Vast as the Soviet Union was, however, it felt,

like other empires, the impulse to extend its frontiers. During the nineteenth century Russia had incorporated great tracts of central Asia, not, as was then supposed, in fulfilment of some settled plan, such as the conquest of India, but by mere momentum and local need. Likewise, in Stalin's day, the Government sought minerals, highways and territories in the Arctic Circle, moved on to meet Japan in the Far East, and watched for opportunities to advance its influence southwards against that of Britain. All these, however, would be new gains, made by a new organism, the Soviet Union. On the western frontier alone, but there as the crow flies for a full 1,800 miles, it was confronted by lands lately Russian, but now frowning on the Soviet Union—Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Bessarabia. Behind this western wall stood Germany, which in the Great War had gone far towards conquering Russia. At Brest-Litovsk, early in 1918, the Germans had deprived her of more than one-third of her population and nearly nine-tenths of her coal, while without the Ukraine, which they coveted, she would be hard pressed for food and minerals, and cut off from the Black Sea.

The resettlement of Europe, however, left Germany as well as Russia a pruned and partitioned empire. At the expense of both, Poland had been thrust between them. Although disarmed, Germany

could still make treaties, and in 1922, at Rapallo, she came to an agreement with the Bolsheviks. Some return to the traditional collaboration by which Germany had supplied Russia with competent officials of many kinds thus lay open, and a common desire to be rid of the new Poland was not excluded. Poland comprised a quarter of the Ukraine. Though Stalin was still relatively obscure, his resentment at the Polish victories of 1920 may well have been one of the chief results of that campaign. The non-aggression pact between the Soviet and Poland in 1932 might serve to promote trade, but it could not indicate concord. The Poles continued to arrest Communist agents, and to refuse, whatever the emergency, to allow Soviet armies to cross their frontier. Their non-aggression pact of 1934 with Germany, however, was a measure of self-defence, rather than an anti-Soviet move. For Poland, an aggression against either Great Power remained unthinkable.

Germany, meanwhile, had fallen under the spell of a party whose autocratic leader proclaimed an anti-Communist crusade and declared that the Ukraine must be German. During the first six years of Nazi rule (1933-1938) this threat to Russia gained force with every stage of rearmament and with each new conquest. The "axis" agreement with Italy, the annexation of Austria, the creation of a vast

air force and of a navy commanding the Baltic, were accomplished while the Soviet was executing its experienced officers and diverting much of its force towards China. Then it failed in Spain, its bastion in Czechoslovakia crumbled, and Munich made the value of the French alliance doubtful, as Abyssinia had discounted that of the League of Nations. The Nazis, it was well known, regarded Russia as on the verge of disintegration.

The directors of the Soviet Union might well play for time. The new Germany was beyond all doubt a formidable foe. Poland, a martial State with a large army, if won by German threats or promises might join in the attack. On the other hand, the Nazi system was not unlike the Bolshevist. Both regarded the capitalist as undesirable, the citizen as a creature without rights against the State, and the State as the tool of the Party. Neither had or could have any sincere friend among the other States of Europe. To both, the existence of Poland was an affront and an injury. Why, Moscow must ask herself, should not the new Leaders, far more powerful than the former Tsar and Kaiser, resume a collaboration which in the nineteenth century had proved not incompatible with the mutual ill-will deep rooted in their two nations? The Soviet might thus gain temporary security and permanent aggrandisement, with time to consolidate and fortify, and all the

profits that could be derived from a safe and eager neighbouring market. Had not Lenin declared for marching with any Power so long as their roads lay parallel ?

History may disclose the stages by which the German-Soviet pact of August 1939 came into being. The German military leaders welcomed it, declaring that in fighting the democratic-capitalistic world Germany and Russia were at one. The war which it unleashed produced an almost instantaneous revolution in the Baltic. Though the small Polish fleet and navy contrived to escape, Poland as a Baltic country vanished. Germany, the Soviet Union and Lithuania gained weight at her expense. But Europe saw with astonishment that the Germans had consented to the virtual restoration of the old boundaries of the Russian Empire upon the Baltic.

That Finland, with less than four million people and no pledged allies, dared to withstand a neighbour with forty times her numbers and with Germany as a likely seconder, was heroism worthy of the heroic deeds which followed. Within three months the Finns had deprived the Soviet of one great benefit from the German bargain, that reputation for irresistible strength which Germany's courtship and the triumphs in Poland, Estonia and Latvia had confirmed. It is by no means impossible that the Soviet rulers, deceived by the vast size of their army,

by its great accumulation of munitions and by its recent success in a pitched battle with the Japanese, overlooked their lack of trained and skilful leaders. It is probable that they believed that in Finland and other border States masses who were Communist or ripe for Communism were being kept down by force. It is certain that their loss of Baltic ports and provinces twenty years earlier was so conspicuous and sweeping as to challenge them to attempt redress. None the less they insulted the civilised world by the pretext that their invasion of Finland was made in self-defence, and they outraged humanity by widespread massacre from the air. Every day that victory thus attempted was delayed, lessened their advantage over the Germans.

Finland apart, that advantage had been very great. The Russians were neutral, technically the friend of both belligerents, able to trade with both and to exact high prices and prompt payment for their goods. While Germany had conquered for them half of Poland and abandoned the eastern Baltic, they had given her only fair words. From being their bugbear, uniting their enemies, notably Japan and Italy, into an anti-Comintern confederation, she had become their suppliant, deprived in great measure of the sympathy of Italy, Japan and Spain. She was, moreover, embroiled in a war with other non-Communist States which made it unlikely that for

many years she would be strong enough for an anti-Soviet crusade. As the Allies tightened their blockade, she must become more and more dependent on Russian resources and goodwill.

The sole hostage for future favour which had been given by the Soviet to Germany was the eastern half of Poland. The downfall of Germany, it was clear, would jeopardise this Soviet conquest. The Soviet, however, gained some advantage against Germany from the principle of self-determination. While western Poland was racially a Polish land, containing some German islets, eastern was largely Ukrainian or White Russian, with a large minority of Poles. Whenever the new partition came to be undone, the inhabitants of this eastern sector might desire reunion with Poland, union with some other State, or independence—an uncertainty from which the western half is free. Thus the Soviet, if still existing at the peace, would have a chance of retaining some part of its conquest otherwise than by force.

In 1904 the German Emperor had urged the Tsar to fight in the Far East against the Yellow Peril, assuring him of German sympathy against their common foe. Cynics interpreted his policy as designed to change Russia from a menace into a dependant upon Germany. If in 1939 Hitler and Stalin exchanged these rôles, the essential for a Russian

triumph was her own maintenance of peace. Given peace, she could fortify her new frontier, enlarge, equip and train her army, and raise the standard of life among her people from the profits of her German trade. As the apostle of peace she had secured many docile disciples among the democracies. Some at least of these could stomach her proclamation that she entered Poland to check anarchy, with the cordial support of the people. Many acquiesced in her establishment of air bases in small republics which had been parts of the recent Russian empire. With Germany well established as the aggressive Power, it might be a public benefit to curtail her activities by a quasi-protectorate over States that could never hope to defend themselves against her unaided. All this was lost by the assault on Finland. Immediate success might have obscured the facts that the Finns had offered to make great concessions and that their repressed Communists awaiting deliverance were few or none. It is significant that in February 1940 some English Communists and others still remained unconvinced that the Soviet was the aggressor. By that time, however, she had been thrust out of the League of Nations; international opinion condemned her more bitterly than Britain when in conflict with the Boers, and it seemed that Palmerston's dictum, "Russia is a great humbug," might still be true.

An inglorious campaign against a tiny race of peasants threatened to tilt the balance of advantage in favour of Germany.

In the spring, indeed, the Russians gained all, and more than all, that they had asked of Finland, and could settle down to digest their numerous gains. Their future attitude towards the war and towards the Baltic cannot be predicted with confidence. Among the many unknown factors which must determine it, not the least is the progress of the struggle between China and Japan. The chief will certainly be the profit of the Party. Remote, self-contained, poor and largely ignorant of foreign lands, Russia must hope for calamities beyond her borders which will reduce the disparity in comparative well-being and kindle a desire for revolution. The downfall of the Allies would leave her with an overweening and insatiable neighbour: their triumph might be followed by a Bolshevist central Europe. In an exhausted Continent Russia for a time might dominate at least the eastern Baltic. A Europe ruled by Germany might swiftly dissolve the Soviet Union and transfer its richest regions to the Reich.

CHAPTER VII

GERMANY AND THE BALTIC

IN Germany the long series of Baltic countries finds at once its climax and its close. The title of "the German Ocean," sometimes assigned in England to the German-named North Sea, would be better justified by history if applied to the German "East Sea," or Baltic. As we have seen, indeed, the Baltic has served many successive lords, but the Germans, in the later Middle Ages the German Hansards, and in modern days the German Reich, have wielded an unrivalled supremacy. One of the two gates into the Sea, the Kiel Canal, belongs to Germany alone; the other, that through Scandinavian waters, she can practically close at will. Her Baltic coastline, which for seventy years stretched from Flensburg as far as Memel, was broken only from 1919 to 1939 by the short strips amputated at Versailles. Even then her ten ports on the Baltic formed a galaxy unrivalled by any other State, while by land and sea and air she gained strength to exercise an irresistible control.

This great position was in part the outcome of the

mediaeval expansion of the German race ; in part, that of the policy of Bismarck and his successors. The earlier Germans dispossessed or subjugated the Slavs of the Baltic southern shore, and established settlements and trading stations even in the Gulf of Finland. Bismarck wrested Slesvig and Holstein from the Danish monarchy, and his successors, declaring that the future of Germany lay on the water, cut a canal through the Jutland peninsula and built up a mighty fleet. During the Great War Russia had more Baltic ports than Germany, yet her naval power, united with that of Britain and France, could not prevent the Baltic from becoming a German lake.

Twenty years of peace have only made German ascendancy still greater. During that time the Russians have been cramped behind a coastal strip not greatly wider than the Polish. Denmark has never recovered from the dread of Germany inspired by her dismemberment in 1864. Sweden, with far more friendly feelings, had neither desire nor power to challenge German primacy. Excepting Poland, with her infant navy, the remaining Baltic countries are weaker than the Scandinavian. The masters of Kiel and Lübeck, of Stettin, Königsberg and once again of Memel, need fear no rival on the inland sea.

When, in September 1939, the Soviet Union

struck in Poland, the question of German predominance within the Baltic naturally arose. By capturing Danzig and Gdynia the Germans had added the foremost of its trade routes to those which they had hitherto controlled. It soon appeared, however, that the price of Soviet collaboration included at least the military domination of the eastern coast from the head of the Gulf of Bothnia to Libau south of Riga. What equivalent, men asked, can Germany have required in return for the abandonment of her own designs for Baltic empire both by land and sea?

The answer cannot yet be known, and the terms of the equivalent, if ever precisely stated, may never be disclosed. The relations between the two Great Powers, however, are so vital to the status of the Baltic that some indisputable factors in their causation must be recalled to mind. The foremost problem, alike for the Baltic and the wider world, is whether the concord momentarily established can be lasting. Has the fierce denunciation of the Bolshevists by Hitler's tongue and pen been only a smoke-screen of Nazi policy, or are the Germans and the Russians natural enemies?

History shows at least a long antagonism between the Slav and Teuton. For many centuries the Germans have been striving, often with great success, to expel the Slavs from their homes, or to settle among them and subdue them. In some cases the

eastward movement has been peaceful, designed, as by Catherine of Russia, to raise the level of civilisation in backward lands. Other State-inspired colonial movements have aimed at defending German provinces against the Slavs, whose more rapid multiplication threatens degermanisation. Such were the East German colonisation of Bismarck and his successors, while the ruthless eviction of Poles and Jews and the recall of Germans from foreign lands to replace them has lately shown that in Nazi eyes mere human rights count for nothing. It may be confidently stated that Germans despise Slavs as their born inferiors, and that Slavs regard the soulless efficiency of the Germans with contempt. Yet although Prussia as a kingdom owed much of her character to the absorption of the indigenous Slavs, it has proved easier in modern times for Slavs to absorb Germans than the reverse. Even the "Baltic Barons" softened perceptibly with time.

It is well known that when Russia accepted the German challenge in 1914 masses of Russians hailed the war as a war of liberation from the Germans. In 1914, moreover, Germany was less fanatically nationalist than the Germany which has since expelled the Jews, and less inspired with missionary zeal than that which has promoted the pact against the Communist International. Russia, on the other hand, was then nationalist and even pan-Slavonic—

an attitude since replaced by a doctrinaire Bolshevism which despises race. Her virtual dictator is a Georgian ; many of her chief statesmen have been Jews ; a heterogeneous Party welds and sways the Union. Its policy has always been to make serviceable allies and later, if need be, to destroy them. That its own principles were great and must prevail was an article of faith, and it could readily believe that only governmental repression prevented the proletarians of all lands from uniting.

As time went on, however, it was widely observed that in Moscow Communism seemed to count for less and Imperialism for more. Social variety replaced in fact the one-class collectivism of the early Bolshevik creed. The recovery of Bessarabia was talked of, and, in fear of Germany, the Bolsheviks entered the League of Nations, which they had earlier declared to be as useful to the Soviet as a fifth wheel to a cart. In such a mood, they might well rejoice at the German offer of an understanding.

To the Germans, whose programme of conquest by threats had unexpectedly been checked by Poland, an *entente* with the Soviet offered immense advantages. How, they might well ask, could the Poles then continue to refuse compliance with their demands ? Both in the west and north Poland lay open to irresistible attack, and no ally could save her. France without Britain would not dare to move,

nor Britain without Russia. Even if the Western Powers were so foolhardy as to make war, they could do nothing against the Siegfried position, held by forces superior on the ground and in the air. Either, therefore, Poland, by yielding, would take the first step on the road towards subservience to Germany and exclusion from the Baltic, or, by standing firm, she would give Germany the opportunity of ending her independence. Compared with such alternatives, the consistency of the Leader was a trifle. Success would blind his disciplined people to his inconsistencies as in the case of Czechoslovakia and many another problem.

Such may well have been the calculations which first put an end to Hitler's denunciations of the Soviet and then caused the long negotiation to begin. Courted by both sides, the Stalin Government could and did place an enormous price on its assistance. As Poland remained firm and the Western Powers neither discouraged her nor themselves gave signs of yielding, Germany must either accept diplomatic defeat or pay the Russian price. Part of that price, or the whole, if war should follow, was the eastern half of Poland and control of the eastern Baltic.

Ostensibly at least, the Germans thus renounced much that, early in 1918, had been within their grasp. From Finland to Galicia they were pre-

pared to sacrifice important spheres of influence, of which the southernmost had formerly been Austrian soil and never Russian. If war came, the rich Ukraine would certainly be barred against the future armies to the utmost of Soviet power.

Such sacrifices may have been commended to them by some of the following calculations :

(1) That war would be averted and Poland sacrificed at a second Munich conference. Germany would then be spared the humiliating eviction of many thousands of her sons from Russia and from the " Baltic States."

(2) That if war came, the agreement would bring rewards in Poland or elsewhere far outweighing the attendant sacrifice.

(3) That a war on a single front, with a friendly Soviet in the rear, would reverse the verdict of the Great War and bring Germany incalculable gains.

(4) That the war in the west would be mild and indecisive, to be followed by immense conquests from the corrupt and decaying Soviet Union.

(5) That the time was ripe for a lasting *entente* between two Powers which, united, could dominate the greater part of Europe and Asia, to the immense enrichment of both their Governments and peoples.

The profit which a lasting *entente* with Russia might bring to the Germans seems indeed incalculable. It would deliver them from that nightmare of war on

two fronts which once drove Frederick the Great to abdicate and in the Great War drained Germany for three campaigns. Secure of a Russia which they themselves had organised, the Germans could snap their fingers at the democracies' blockade. Their ideal of a manufacturing and military Germany served on the east and south-east by food-producing secondary States might be replaced by that of the widest of land States dependent on them for the development of its agricultural and mineral wealth, its industries and transport. What German stewards had been to many Russian landowners in Tsarist days, that German experts and technicians might become to the vast Soviet Union. With Russia thus organised, what power in Asia could withstand their united force? And their ambitions might well range far beyond Asia.

The nineteenth century, indeed, had shown that an *entente* between Russia and Germany might be lasting, even though Slavs and Teutons were inharmonious. The Powers which, despite their former rivalry and wars, had united to partition Poland and to depose Napoleon established in 1814 a Russo-Prussian concord which lasted a hundred years. Its mainstay was the resolve of Prussia to "keep the wire open to St. Petersburg," however bitterly she might contend with Austria or Austria with Russia. Its ultimate dissolvent was the rivalry between the

Austrian and Russian Empires for rule over Slavonic peoples. To-day the Austrian Empire has vanished, and the Russian is anything but Slav, while Prussia dominates a unified Greater Germany.

The prospectus of the Soviet-German *entente*, none the less, abounds in hints of possible or probable disaster. That of the nineteenth century flourished when Prussia was but a dwarf beside the Russian giant, and perished when Prussia had created the German Empire. Revived in 1922, when Germany was weak, it was disclaimed and scorned when Hitler arrived at power.

As adumbrated now, it cannot disguise the truth that Germany would enter the partnership as the superior Power, called in to confer upon the Russians an organisation of mines and factories and transport which they have desired without being able to create. The hatred that the German stewards formerly inspired would almost certainly reappear. Acceptance of a German technical hierarchy would ill accord with the daily boasts made by the Soviet of its achievements within the last ten years, while to allow any considerable body of foreigners to journey freely within the Union would be a revolutionary innovation. Sooner or later, therefore, and probably without long delay, the coalition would probably dissolve, even if Germany retained her Nazi Government. Should Moderates or Monarchists

gain power, a close *entente* with godless Communism would be improbable, even if Germans and Russians had not been driven from Poland. German autocracy in the western Baltic and Russian in the eastern, both detested by all the inhabitants except their own nationals, can hardly prove enduring.

In Baltic Poland and in Denmark the Germans by force or fraud have overcome all local opposition. It is safe to assume that only force will prevent them from enslaving both, although in different ways. The Polish Corridor and Danzig will certainly rank with Posnania and Upper Silesia as provinces which only a prostrate Germany will temporarily renounce, and only if German power is broken can the Danes hope for real independence. Those deep differences in temperament and outlook which divide the German from the Russian make any joint administration of Baltic affairs improbable, while the ambitions of their ruling parties may well clash at no very distant date. The Russians have long ruled Lithuania, but German influence in the Gulf of Finland is of far more ancient date. As in the war so in the following peace, however, the Baltic relationships are likely to be determined by events and conditions in other fields.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

IN the early summer of 1940 it seems impossible to draw the horoscope of the Baltic by observation of its ancient and recent history. The present German and Russian domination rests upon three pillars, and of each the strength is as yet unknown. Whether the Nazis and the Bolshevists will long continue to govern their own countries is as little certain as the character of their mutual relationship in days to come. While around the Baltic coasts, moreover, nationality provides singularly clear-cut divisions, at no great distance from its southern shore there are vast regions where the strength and influence of that principle are extremely ill-defined. Thus the rise of a Great Ukrainian movement or a determined rally by oppressed Slavonic populations might transform the Baltic situation.

For the moment, however, it would appear that the outcome of a war which has convulsed only small sections of the Baltic must go far to decide its fate. Man, it is true, cannot greatly modify the decrees of nature, and as a highway that sea must

remain of little use for one-third of the year, while on the north its riparian States can support only a slender population. Moreover, although some tortuous connexion by water with the Euxine may be devised, both seas must remain landlocked, and the Jutish peninsula must continue to control both the main gates into the Baltic. Except perhaps Poland, all its chief countries will retain other outlets to the wider world. Its products, chiefly of food and timber, have indeed gained an important place in the economy of western Europe, but they can hardly be termed indispensable. Some ground will therefore remain for regarding the Baltic as one of the less vital regions of the Continent. In culture, on the other hand, the region ranks among the highest. In two decades the five States, Finland, Poland and the three "Baltic republics," which were freed from the German and Russian yoke at the close of the Great War, have proved beyond all doubt that they are admirable members of the family of nations, enlightened, vigorous and progressive. While their former masters have become totalitarian, sacrificing individual freedom on the altar of collective power, the emancipated peoples have approached, as closely as their initial difficulties permitted, the highest civilisation and democracy of the West. Judged by Western standards, their rise has formed an almost unmixed gain to the human race.

War has proved, however, that in the conditions of 1939 no Baltic people save perhaps the two Great Powers can hope to maintain its freedom unaided. It is doubtful, indeed, whether all the rest combined could hold in check the German Empire. It seems certain that, when the Germans attacked Poland, even Soviet non-intervention and an inconceivable rally by the remaining six would not have reversed the verdict. The 25,000,000 genuine Poles then considerably surpassed the whole sextet, both in numbers and in experience of large-scale war.

Teuton and Slav, it is true, are inharmonious, and any German undertaking to refrain from seizing what the State requires may be broken without warning. It is likely for many reasons that fresh quarrels between the two great partners will arise. But it would be foolhardy to assume that a conflict between them is inevitable or even imminent. Their agreement to partition Poland and to establish groups of Baltic client States only revives and extends the arrangement which survived the nineteenth century. While its two Great Powers remain in amity, the Baltic can be made safe for democracy only by the complete triumph and continued solidarity of the Western allies in their struggle against the Germans.

If the Germans could again be reduced to their submissive mood of 1919, a new Peace Conference might hope, for a time at least, to safeguard the

freedom of the Baltic and other States of Europe. Such a body, profiting by experience, would perhaps decree for Germany disarmament by sea and air and the restoration to Denmark of her boundaries of 1864, aided by far-reaching guarantees and a transfer of the Holstein population. With the Rhine and Baltic thus policed, an eastern federation of Poland and her neighbours should be able to maintain its independence. The peacemakers will at least have a fourfold advantage over those of 1919. They will know, alas ! that it is vain to trust in an omnipotent League of Nations or in a change of heart in Germany. But they will also know that Bolshevism is abhorred by the neighbours of the Soviet Union and that the Polish nation, in spite of every handicap, has shown itself capable and great.

Eight months of war have sufficed to render at least as many small States hopeless save after a signal victory of the Allies. Therein lies the fundamental problem of the Baltic, which nature and history have made pre-eminently the home of peoples small in numbers but great in soul.

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